Adventure

THE UNIVERSITY
OF TEXAS
FEB 15 1943
THE LIBRARY

APRIL
15 CENTS

DAY AND NIGHT
HE WATCHED . . ."

A HIP McDONALD
STORY . . . BY
HAPSBURG LIEBE

Digitized by Google

To ADVENTURE Readers

If you know any trustworthy man or woman, young or old, who wants a "chance to get ahead," you can do them (and us) a favor by showing them this advertisement. It presents a *real* opportunity for exceptionally well-paid spare time or permanent employment.

Extra Money for ADVENTURE Representatives

Will YOU Be Our Representative In Your Town?

We have representatives now in over 10,000 towns and cities—boys and girls 15 years old to men and women 80 years young. In some cities we want *more* representatives to take care of our rapidly growing subscription list. In thousands of towns where we are not now represented, we want some one to collect the renewal orders of our present subscribers and forward new subscriptions. The pay is exceptional. Many of our representatives

Prizes every month for every representative who sends five or more subscriptions—all in addition to the liberal commission paid on each order—make our field staff the largest and best-paid force of subscription-getters in the world. Our offer to representatives is the most liberal ever made by any magazine. To get full particulars,

Fill out this coupon to-day

AA

Earn $1.00 an Hour In Spare Time

This is possible only under the plan by which our representatives are rewarded—the fairest and most liberal that could be devised. Liberal commissions are paid on every order and *extra prize money* at the end of each month to *every representative who sends us five or more subscriptions.*

Monthly Prizes Won Easily

Miss Mary E. Kyle, in a city of 79,000, sent 29 subscriptions and won **$25.00.**

Leslie Curtis, in a town of 24,000 population, sent 11 subscriptions and won **$5.00.**

W. J. Graham, in a town of 9,500 population, sent 15 subscriptions and won **$10.00.**

J. H. Brignall, Mrs. H. C. Minor, Mrs. M. J. Wiley, all in towns of less than 7,500 population, each sent 20 subscriptions and each won **$20.00.**

W. W. Williams, in a town of less than 1,000 population, sent 22 subscriptions and won **$15.00.**

Ada Carr, in a town of 750 population, sent 7 subscriptions and won **$4.00.**

These prizes, remember, were all in addition to the commissions we paid on each order.

Do these rewards seem exceptional? There were hundreds of other representatives who were equally well paid.

More Prizes Next Month and Easier Than Ever to Win

Experience is not essential. We train you in the work. Every month there are "beginners" among the biggest prize winners. We do not want "canvassers"—but ambitious people who are known and respected in their home community.

Write to-day for full particulars.

Why Be "Hard Up" When Money is So Easily Earned

It should not be hard for YOU to earn **$1.00** for every hour you devote to our interests.

THE RIDGWAY CO.
Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York.

Send me full particulars regarding commissions and prizes offered representatives. I would like to represent you in (name of town).....

I can devote.....hours a week to your interests.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....

Digitized by Google

ADVENTURE

VOL. 5 NO. 6

Arthur Sullivant Hoffman
Managing Editor

Contents for April 1913

Cover Design	W. Herbert Dunton	
Private Murdock's G. C. M. A Story	Talbot Mundy	3
Black Viper and the Law. A Story A Hip McDonald Incident	Hapsburg Liebe	15
According to the Books. A Story	H. D. Couzens	21
The Law of Club and Fang. **A Complete Novel**	Barton Wood Currie	31
Inside the Fort. A Story A Tale of the Afghan Border	W. Townend	63
Curiosities of Dueling. An Article	Marvin Dana	72
Carfew Takes Advice. A Story	Edgar Wallace	77
Down the Old Mississipp'. A Serial Story. I. How Three Men and a Motor-Boat Drifted into Amusing Adventures among the River-Folk	Raymond S. Spears	83
The Devil. A Story A Philippine Adventure	Dwight L. Loughborough	99
Yaller Hedges, College-Man. A Story	Frederick Arthur Dominy	106
Butting in on Mexico. An Article	James Mullins, Jr.	113
61° N., 61° W. **A Complete Novelette**	Stephen Allen Reynolds	122
The Unbelievers. A Story	George Vaux Bacon	136
Silver-Shoes. A Serial Story. IV. A Tale of the Spanish Main and Sir Henry Morgan's Expedition Against Panama	George S. Reed	141
The Testimony of the Dead Man. A Story	Hugh Pendexter	159
The Outlaw Himself. A Story Further Adventures of the Vicarious Outlaw	Eugene P. Lyle, Jr.	164
The *Sevastopol*, Cotton-Clad. A Story	Joseph Mills Hanson	171
The Fighting Parson of "The Dubs." A Story	W. Robert Foran	181
John Drummond, Gentleman Adventurer. An Article	Henry Collins Walsh	188
The Crimson Mask. **A Complete Novel** An Old-Fashioned Melodrama with Some New Thrills	Jackson Gregory	191
The Camp-Fire A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers		218
Headings	T. Victor Hall	

Issued monthly. Yearly subscription, $1.50 in advance. Single copy, fifteen cents

Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. Canadian postage, 30 cents.

Trade-mark Registered; Copyright, 1913, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain

Published by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

Erman J. Ridgway, President — Ray Brown, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring & Macdougal Streets, New York City

5, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered at the New York Post-Office as Second Class Matter

Digitized by Google

"IT IS the tale of a siege of a hill fort on the northwest frontier of India, such as took place at Chitval in 1895. But there is a fight up there every few years regularly." This is W. Townend's story in the present number. But while we're talking about him we'll let him talk for himself. Mr. Townend is an Englishman, and you already know him through his stories of Mr. Harrington and others—"A-Roving" last month, "The Prodigal Son," "A Deal in Real Estate," and others. The following are only some of the things that have happened to him:

I AM afraid the few disconnected fragments I have tried to jot down for you will not be of much interest, but my own experiences have been in no way thrilling or out of the ordinary. Where I am luckier than most people perhaps is that I have been thrown into the company of men who have as a mere matter of duty lived adventurous lives—soldiers and sailors, prospectors, cow-punchers and frontiersmen generally—and it is from these men that I have got most of my tales.

All my own people are what we call "service people," that is, Army or Navy, and I myself was destined for the Army, but, as often happens, the sight of one of my eyes was an insurmountable barrier to my passing into the "shop," i. e., the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, which with Sandhurst corresponds to West Point. Woolwich is the training college for officers in the gunners and sappers—Royal Artillery and Engineers; Sandhurst for the Cavalry and Infantry.

So, the Army being closed owing to the aforesaid eye, I tried to settle down to a respectable, steady-going life of routine in London, and found after a year or so that I couldn't. Wherefore I went wandering and have been more or less of a wanderer ever since, and drifted into trying to write stories because, I suppose, I couldn't help myself.

I have managed to cover a good deal of the world's surface, one way or another, but only a very small portion of what I would like to do. When I was a kid, Army life took us to many garrison towns at home and abroad, and most of my early recollections seem to be intermingled with the red coat of Tommy Atkins. And there was always a constant succession of soldier orderlies and grooms, men of the Sixtieth Rifles, Black Watch, South Lancasters, the King's Own, Royal Artillery, and so on—always ready to talk about *the* Regiment.

As to myself, I am as uninteresting as any one could imagine, but I have the weirdest set of friends in the world; and I am proud to say that I usually get on well with every one, from hoboes and hop-pickers to bos'uns of tramp steamers.

I have been in Canada, Gibraltar, Morocco, Algiers, Spain, Italy, Roumania and various places, and at present I am in San Francisco, not quite decided in my mind as to where I shall go next, my movements always being guided by the great question of Finance.

Most of my meandering has been done in tramp steamers, where more things happen than the Board of Trade and Lloyds allow for. I came out West about a year and a half ago and have at times in the usual way of the wanderer had to work at all kinds of jobs in order to keep above water. Whence my great and overwhelming knowledge on the subject of picking hops and lemons and strawberries, working in packing-houses and on ranches, unloading box-cars, driving wagons, running elevators and selling real estate to Easterners.

But as to personal adventures, nothing doing. Of course, on tramp steamers all kinds of things happen, but they are accepted as a matter of course by everybody.

I have also fallen down a young precipice in Nova Scotia, been arrested in Genoa during a waterside riot in which I was the only non-participant within miles, and in Algiers saved the life of a Prussian fireman from our ship, who being in a cheerful mood yelled with derision at the sight of a battalion of Zouaves, and chanted about 1870 and red breeches. I had taken him on shore to have the biggest tooth in the world extracted, and after an awful time at the dentist's had had to dose him with whisky to revive him. As I had my nose in bandages and could only talk the usual British schoolboy French, we had rather a trying time.

I have been in a fire at sea, and though never actually shipwrecked as yet, have been very near it; as when, after six days in the Bay of Biscay, short-handed, without a sight of the sun, going on dead reckoning when we went at all, we spent a happy night in the Irish Sea wondering when we should pile up on the Smalls, a line of rocks on the coast of Wales. The tide turned just in time, but it was quite exciting for a short while. We had imagined that we were off the Tusker on the Irish coast when one of the hands discovered the light on the starboard bow and we knew we were on the other side of the Channel.

The engine-room was mildly sarcastic at the expense of the bridge. I remember a burly third engineer, a Geordie from Tyneside, saying in a voice of scorn: "They ca's themsel's navigators, do they? Ar ca's them navvys!" This same engineer sat with his shoes off ready for a swim, and told me anecdotes about men who had lived for hours in Western Ocean gales and others who had gone down at once in breezes in that very same Irish Sea.

In the Danube at Sulina, the last place God made—or the first!—the day we were due to sail the ship I was then wandering in broke loose from her moorings and ran amuck, much to the horror of the lighters alongside and the shipping generally. The subsequent lying would have delighted Ananias immensely. Most of the ship's company had to pack their kit-bags and clear when the ship reached Cardiff, as the owners had to bear the loss of the damaged cargo, not the insurance people, for it was proved that the captain and mates allowed the vessel to be loaded below Plimsoll mark, thus causing most of our troubles thereafter.

But heaps of things happen at sea, as I said before.

Digitized by Google

Adventure
Registered in the United States Patent Office
APRIL
1913
VOL. V
NO. VI

PRIVATE MURDOCK'S G.C.M.

By Talbot Mundy

"NOT another drop!" said Private Murdock, waving a knotted hand in a gesture of self-denial.

Smiley Simpson, Murdock's bosom friend, had a little pile of half-pennies already counted out on the beer-wet canteen table between them.

"Go on!" he said scornfully. "Add yours to it, an' shut up talkin' rot!"

But Murdock was temptation-proof. He made a wry face that was suggestive—but only just suggestive—of disgust.

"What's come over you?" demanded Smiley, with the air of a man whose best friend has gone back on him. "Another 'alf-gallon won't do no 'arm!"

Murdock banged his fist upon the table, making the empty beer-jug and the tumblers rattle.

"Not if it was the last 'alf-gallon in this 'ere canteen, nor in the 'ole perishin' world neither, I wouldn't touch it!" he answered. "Mine's a packet o' cigarettes. You 'elp yourself!"

Simpson ordered a fresh half-gallon, with the air of a man whose last lingering belief in man's humanity had at length been shattered. "I wouldn't ha' believed it o' you, George Christopher!" he said wearily.

"That's just it!" said Murdock. "You've put your bloomin' finger on the bloomin' spot at the very first bloomin' guess!"

"'Ow d' you mean?" Simpson poured himself a glassful from the fresh-filled jug, and smacked his lips exasperatingly in joyous anticipation.

"George Christopher!" said Murdock. "That's the deadly secret! Them's the clue to this 'ere 'eroic depri—deprivation! What's my initials, what my godfather an' godmother give me in my baptism? Ain't they 'G. C. M?' An' what does 'G. C. M.' stand for? Tell me that!"

"Good Conduc' Medal!" answered Smiley,

Copyright, 1913, by The Ridgway Company. All rights reserved.

Digitized by Google

on whom enlightenment was slowly dawning. "But strike me perishin', everlastin' Threes About, you ain't goin' to 'ave a try for that, are you!"

"George Christopher Murdock—G. C. M.—Good Conduc' Medal! Sounds like a pretty fair 'unch to me!" said Murdock.

Smiley dropped his jaw and stared at him.

"An' d' you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that you're goin' to do yourself out of an' extry 'alf-gallon o' beer, just because your bloomin' initials are——! You! Why, you perishin' hypocrite! S' 'elp me two men an' a boy, if I 'aven't seen you reelin', rollin', staggerin' drunk more times than I can count!"

"Maybe you 'ave," said Murdock, "an' maybe you 'aven't! Point is, I 'aven't never been up on charges!"

"That's just your perishin' dorg's luck!" retorted Smiley, who had no altruistic desire that his bosom friend should bear a saintly reputation.

"There you go again!" said Murdock. "That's where the 'unch comes in! G. C. M.—Good Conduc' Medal—George Christopher Murdock! You calls it luck. I calls it the bloomin' Act o' Providence, an' be'aves accordin'!"

"'Ow much service 'ave you got?" demanded Simpson, still incredulous.

"Thirteen year an' seven months, come a week nex' Tuesday."

"An' you're goin' to stay sober for more 'n five months, just a-cause your perishin' initials 'appens to be G. C. M.? You go an' tell that to a perishin' nursemaid! I don't believe it!"

"She is a nursemaid!" answered Murdock sheepishly.

"Ah-h-h! So 'elp me! I knowed there was a woman somewhere, 'idin' be'ind this 'ere bloomin' 'unch! Come on, you old blighter! Come off that there 'igh 'orse o' yourn an' cough up the details! Out with 'em!"

He pushed the beer-jug to one side, placed his elbow on the table, rammed his thumb down into his pipe and crossed his legs to listen. Here was a real story coming! Murdock of all people! George Christopher Murdock, the canteen clubman, in love with a nursemaid, and off his beer!

"Go on!" he ordered. "Out with it!"

Murdock glanced cautiously around him, to make sure that he was not overheard. But at that time of day the canteen was almost empty.

"She's got a pa!" he said darkly.

"Curse 'er pa!" said Smiley, without a suspicion of reverence. "Tell us about *'er!*"

"But 'er pa's the point!"

"Shove 'im in the 'ole where 'e belongs, then! Let's 'ear about *'er!*"

"'E's well fixed, too," said Murdock, ignoring the interruption. "Little 'am-an'-beef shop, 'alf-way down 'Igh Street, Richmond!"

"All right! Pa runs a' 'am-an'-beef shop. I got that! Now, go on an' tell us about the gal!"

"SHE'S a little bit of all right!" confided Murdock. "Nursemaid, up at Mrs. 'Aviland's 'ouse on Richmond 'Ill. Two dinky little kids to look after, all two of 'em in one pram—an' 'er pushin' it, an' me walkin' alongside, same as if the kids was hers an' mine! Can't you see me?"

"You bet I can—not! You're a fine-lookin' soldier to take a nursemaid out walkin', I don't think! 'Ow do the kids like it? Pore little beggars, I pities 'em!"

"Them two kids thinks I'm Gawd A'-mighty!" said Murdock, with an air of mild reproof.

"Go on!" said Simpson. "Tell us some more."

"So does she," said Murdock dreamily.

"Pore fool!" said Simpson. "Go on! I'm listenin'!"

"'Er pa's the point!" said Murdock. "'E's the bloomin' 'am-an'-beef expert, what wants to upset the 'ole bag o' tricks. 'E's the perishin' want-to-know-everythin' cuss that's tryin' to stand in 'tween me an' my gal!"

"Wait for a dark night," suggested Smiley, "an' interduce 'im to the buckle-end of a belt!"

Murdock reflected on that advice for a minute, and then shook his head.

"'E called me a 'dissolute private o' the Line.' 'Ow's that for a blighter? What?"

"A bloke called me somethin' o' that kind once," said Simpson. "It cost 'im three-seventeen-six for a set o' himitation teeth!"

"All very well an' good!" said Murdock. "But that bloke weren't your gal's pa! I can't punch 'is face, 'cause she

Digitized by Google

thinks the world of him, —— pity her! She'd sing me the merry so-long, quicker'n I could punch 'im once an' cover up! Besides, 'e's the bloated capitalist what I'm countin' on! 'Er pa's gettin' on in years, an' 'e'll want some one by an' by to run the 'am-an'-beef shop for 'im, an' my time's pretty near up. 'Ow about me runnin' it, eh? Me an' Susie Blakely? Me cuttin' up the 'am an' beef, an' 'er ringin' up the cash-register, an' settin' the place to rights? Don't that sound good?"

"Depends on Susie—Blakely, did you say 'er name was? It all depends on 'er! I wouldn't let no perishin' woman 'ave charge o' no cash-register!"

"Nor 'er old man wouldn't let me 'ave charge of it, neither!" said Murdock, with an air of absolute certainty. "'Er old man's the point, as I said before. 'E's a 'oly terror, 'e is! I tells 'im, fair an' square, as I wants to marry Susie. An' 'e says, right off the reel, mind yer, as 'ow a soldier's dissolute, an' 'is daughter ain't goin' to marry no one what's dissolute, not so long as 'e knows it! So I goes an' gets a copy o' the Reggilations, an brings it to 'im, an' shows 'im where it says about the Good Conduc' Medal, an' 'ow the man as gets it 'as to put in fourteen year o' service without a single charge of any kind against him."

"What good did that do?" asked Simpson.

"None! I expected as 'ow he'd change 'is opinion o' the bloomin' Army, seein' 'ow careful they was in the Reggilations about the men's character. But don't you believe it! 'E says to me 'Go an' get a Good Conduc' Medal!' 'e says, 'an' then I'll know for sure you ain't dissolute!' So I'm down to 'alf a gallon a day for the nex' five months!"

"Well, strike me pink!" commented Simpson. "If it ain't the limit, what a man'll do for a woman, when the fancy takes 'im!"

"Can't you see me on parade," said Murdock, "standin' out in front of all the rest, an' old Gray-Mare's-Husband"—who was his venerable Colonel, by the bye! —"shovin' in 'is heye-glass, an' walkin' up an' down like a game-cock lookin' for a scrap? Can't you 'ear 'im say 'H-any man can get a V. C.—luck enters into that! Even the most dissolute, disgracefully behaved man in a regiment may perform a signal h-act o' bravery under the h-eyes o' his superiors. But it takes a man, a real man, to keep 'imself absolutely straight an' well-be'aved for fourteen years, an' win the G. C. M!' Can't you 'ear 'im?"

"Not with you as the target of 'is hobservations, I can't!" said Smiley.

"I'm goin' to get the G. C. M. or bust!" said Murdock.

"Not you, George Christopher. You take my word for it! Not when there's a woman in the case, you won't! She'll bust your run o' luck. There's somethin' or other goin' to crop up from the —— knows where, an' put a crimp in your propagandrum, George Christopher, my boy. A man who's 'ad all your luck in not gettin' found out is goin' to trip up at the end, as sure as my fist 'ere ain't commissariat rations. 'Specially when there's a woman in the case!"

"Any'ow," said Murdock with determination, "it won't be beer as does the crimpin'! I'm off now. So long!"

"Off where?"

"Richmond—to see 'er."

"Got late leave?"

"No. Back at eleven. So long!"

II

GEORGE CHRISTOPHER MURDOCK, full of splendid resolutions not altogether unconnected with the ham-and-beef shop, took the threepenny bus to Richmond, and arrived there after dark. His prospective father-in-law happened to have gone to Kingston, to see about a fresh supply of saveloys and beef, that evening, so there was no chance of interviewing him and promising to win the medal, or of ingratiating himself by scrubbing the shop-floor.

But he called at the back door of Mrs. Haviland's house on Richmond Hill, and got some beer and cold meat in the kitchen —unbeknown to Mrs. Haviland—and took Susie for a walk in Richmond Park afterward.

When Mars makes love to Venus, their conversation is very similar to that of ordinary folk in like predicament, and what he told her underneath the horse-chestnut trees has been told to girls too often to bear detailed repetition. Except that most of his phrases had a military smack to them, his eloquence on that occasion was much like any other man's.

Digitized by Google

He swore that he would be stricken "Threes About" rather than "retire from his position." He proclaimed that he and she would make a first class "double piquet." He told her that he had been certain of his love after his very first "reconnaissance"—that he had no notion of "marrying her on the strength," but that once his "time was up" and his "discharge was all in order" he would be big enough, and strong enough, and sufficiently righteous-minded to "forage for the two of them," especially if her pa would "issue the camp equipment."

All of his phrases were as understandable as A-B-C to Susie by this time; and the rest of what he told her would have been gold and frankincense and myrrh to any woman, soldier's girl or not.

She assured him, in return, that Mr. Blakely was a merchant of his word, even if his merchandise did consist mainly of ham and beef in slices; and she was positive that what he had said about the Good Conduct Medal would stand for all time. Let George Christopher only behave himself, and win that most-difficult-to-get of medals, and the pealing of the wedding-bells would follow in due course.

At 9 P. M. exactly, as her mistress always stipulated, he saw Susie Blakely back to the big house on the Hill, where she was nursemaid. There he kissed her good-by, with due regard to military form and decorum, and started off to walk back through the Park to Kingston Barracks.

At 11 P. M., exactly, his leave of absence would expire. The canteen would be closed at ten; it was now nine. If he got back before ten, the canteen would still be open, and there would be temptation to be fought. Therefore he would walk, and save threepence into the bargain. And since the night was fine, and he had two whole hours in which to cover a little more than three miles, why hurry?

He slipped through the swinging sidegate and started along under the trees, whistling softly to himself and dreaming pleasant dreams of Susie and the ham-and-beef shop. Whether it was the ham and beef, or what, is immaterial; but before long another thought occurred to him. Like most soldiers—and particularly Cockney soldiers—rabbits fascinated him. He loved to watch the little darlings gambol in the moonlight—and to fling his bayonet with an underhand jerk, transfix a fat one and smuggle it back to barracks inside his tunic. For that matter, there are several ways of carrying a rabbit, once the beastie is defunct, and George Christopher knew every one of them. He also knew where the rabbits were. He had often nabbed as many as three in less than half an hour.

His quest brought him close to a big pond, and set him to listening and watching silently from behind a tree. He watched for several minutes, completely obsessed, before anything but the gamboling of the rabbits drew away his rapt attention. His hand was on his bayonet-hilt, and he was poised on tiptoe for sudden action, when he heard a sob.

IT WAS a bitter, sorrow-laden sob, torn from the tortured soul of a woman. For the moment it startled George Christopher very nearly out of his senses.

His first instinct—immediately obeyed—was to jump clear of the tree and strike an attitude of interested innocence. That brought him full into the moonlight, ten paces from a bench beside the pond. The moment that he left the tree and showed himself a little cry of pleasure welcomed him.

"So you're come at last!" said a low, sweet voice, in which tears still sounded uppermost. "Charlie! I thought you were never coming!"

"My name's not Charlie, Miss!" said Murdock, advancing toward the bench, and making sure that his bayonet was rammed home in its sheath and his tunic straight. "Can I help in any way?"

He could not see her very clearly yet, for she was dressed in some dark stuff that blended with the night. But she seemed young, and her voice was well-modulated and refined, and it occurred to him that she could have no business out in the park alone so late at night.

He came three paces nearer, and she screamed.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "Go away! I mistook you for Cap——"

"No, Miss! Captains don't wear uniform when they're off duty, and mine ain't a captain's uniform either, not by a long way! Maybe I'll do instead, though. Was you lost? I'll show you the way. You ain't got no call to be afraid o' me!

Digitized by Google

Let me 'elp yer, Miss! Let me take yer to ——"

"No, thank you! You can only help me by leaving me alone! I—I expected some one. You didn't happen to see anybody coming in this direction, did you?"

"No, Miss."

George Christopher was peering at her through the darkness very keenly. He saw now that she was very young—not a day more than eighteen, he thought, and possibly still younger. So far as he was able to judge by the feeble moonlight, she was lovelier than any woman he had ever seen.

"You know, Miss," he said respectfully, "this ain't no place for a young lady to be waitin' all alone at this time o' night! 'Arm might come of it! Let me see you to the gate? I'll walk be'ind, so's not to bother you, an' you go on in front, an' change direction when I say!"

"No thank you!" she answered acidly. "I know quite well what I'm doing, and I don't need any assistance from strangers! Would you mind leaving me?"

George Christopher could think of nothing else to do, so he left her. He started off in the direction of the Kingston Gate as fast as he could lay foot to the ground.

"'Cause I'm a bloomin' soldier, I s'pose I ain't good enough to see 'er to the perishin' gate!" he muttered to himself.

He felt indignant at the rebuff he had received, and anxious to put as much ground between her and himself as possible. He stopped, though, before he had gone a hundred paces, and turned and listened. He had heard another sob.

He listened intently for a minute or more. Then he heard another sob—then a splash. That settled it! He clenched his fists, tucked his head down and came back at a run.

He found the bench beside the pond deserted!

For the moment it did not occur to him to look into the water. He ran up and down past the bench on the landward side of it, peering among the trees and in the shadows cast by the moonlight. He could find no traces of her, and he had stopped to scratch his head and think, when his eyes fell on something black that was moving on the water at a little distance from the shore. It was moving away from him, toward the middle of the pond, and he lost no further time. He threw his cap off and plunged in.

It was the girl all right—wading in semicircles, and floundering about waist-deep. The water was rather shallow, but the bottom of the pond was littered up with roots and reeds and fallen branches and, in his hurry to overtake her, he put his foot wrong once or twice, and plunged in headlong. Once he found a deep hole, tumbled into it and disappeared head under.

That scared him, for one of George Christopher's attributes was a disability to swim. But he floundered out again. He wallowed on and overtook her, for he was stronger, of course, than she was, and could wade faster.

She was on her knees when he reached her, shoulder-deep, and ready to dive under. She made an effort to dive, just as he came up with her.

He reached out, seized her below the armpits and lifted her to her feet.

"You can't drown yerself 'ere without a permit!" he said cheerfully. "Strick'ly agin' the law! Come on. It's dryer on the bank!"

"I couldn't find a deep place," she explained, almost with resignation.

"Wish to —— you'd took the same route I did!" he answered fervently. "Swallerin' some o' them frogs' eggs might ha' taught yer a lesson! Come on!"

He coughed out a liberal mouthful of mud and reeds, seized her by the waist and lifted her, holding her as high above the water as he could and making in the direction of the bench again.

"Let me go!" she screamed, kicking to free herself.

He merely held her all the tighter. His efforts to hold her were nearly the cause of his undoing, for he found the deep hole again, and plunged right into it, with the screaming woman in his arms.

It was nearly a minute before he had dragged her out again.

"'OW D' YER like the taste of it?" he asked her, quite good-naturedly, as he scrambled up on the bank, and pulled her after him, and placed her on the bench. "Now, 'urry up an' get your breath back, so's you can scream some more! That way we'll get 'elp! I'll carry yer to the gate, soon as I've bailed my back teeth high an' dry!"

She sat all huddled on the bench for a minute or two, while he tried to deprive

Digitized by Google

himself of some of the liquid ooze he had imbibed.

Suddenly she shivered and sat up.

"I can't face it!" she said desperately. "I can't! I can't! I won't!"

"Somethin' your pa'll 'ave to face'll be the doctor's bill, or else I'm much mistook!" said Murdock, drawing his fingers through his hair, to clear it of reeds and mud. "Gawd didn't mean me to be a fish, that's sure! I'd 'ate to tell yer 'ow much I despise a pond!"

But, at even the casual mention of a possible papa, the girl seemed beside herself again. She rose up from the bench and rushed toward the pond again.

"No, you don't!" said Murdock, interposing his bulky frame. "I ain't issuin' no permits for a swim to-night. I left the book be'ind in me dress-clothes! Who-a, Emma! Back ye get! Shoo!"

He stood between her and the water, holding both arms out to form a sort of barrier, much as the unenlightened try to stop a runaway horse. She made a flank movement, with a speed that startled him, and she had almost reached the water when his strong arms went round her and he had her off her feet again. Once more he sat her on the bench, and once more she collapsed into a heap.

"Now may the Lord love a thirsty bobby!" said Murdock to himself. "Unless my mem'ry fails me, this 'ere situation ain't included in the manual o' drill! What's next, I wonder!"

Before he had said it, almost, she was up again, and running for the pond. He interposed himself again, holding both arms out. She dodged sideways. So did he, and she dodged back again.

"'Ere we goes, gatherin' nuts in May—nuts in May—nuts in May!" sang Murdock, dancing sideways and back again in front of her. "This is the rummest game I ever played at! D' yer 'ear the water squelchin' in my boots? I'm growin' web-footed a'ready! What are we a-playin' at, Miss? Puss in the Corner, or Ring around the Rosebush? Oh, Lordy, why won't she laugh? I'd 'ave 'er to rights then!"

But she had no idea of laughing at all. She was about as far from it as a woman can be; beside herself, demented for the time being, absolutely bent on death. She made another sudden dive for the water and slipped underneath his arm. He ran after her, seized her and spun her round.

"You blamed little fool!" he said. "Can't you tell when you've had enough?"

"Let me go!" she ordered. "D'you hear me, sir? Let me go! I'll report you to my father. He's an officer. He'll know how to deal with you!"

"'F on'y 'e'd show up 'ere an' deal with you," said Murdock, "I'd rest content! You'll make me late in barracks!"

He seized her wrists, and held them tight—so tightly that he hurt her, and she screamed.

"Come on!" he ordered gruffly. "Officer's daughter or not, I've 'ad enough o' this. I 'aven't got all night to go swimmin' in no fish-ponds with you!"

He tugged at her wrists, and she screamed again. Suddenly he heard the sound of a man's footsteps, coming in a hurry through the bracken.

"Thank Gawd!" said Murdock fervently. "Now there'll be two of us!"

A TALL, lean man, dressed in a dark suit, hurried panting through the undergrowth, and reached them at a run, vttering hard panting cries:

"Kitty!" he called. "Kitty! Was that you screaming? Where are you?"

"This 'ere Kitty's been an' got 'er fur wet!" answered Murdock. "Come an' 'elp 'old 'er, will you!"

"Help, Charlie, help!" screamed the girl. Help! Murder!! Help!!!"

The newcomer rushed at Murdock and swung a savage blow at him that landed right between his eyes.

That was too much for George Christopher. He had begun to lose patience with the girl. An unexpected blow—unearned, undeserved, gratuitous—from the quarter whence he had expected help turned on his wrath.

He loosed the girl's wrists and struck back—a savage, short-arm, hooked blow for the stomach, that landed where he meant it to, and brought the stranger up all-standing.

"Now, 'ere goes to get me warm again!" growled George Christopher, no longer the gallant dallier with women, but Mars, angry and red-hot from the barrack-room.

He led off with his right, and landed. The stranger clinched. In a moment they were down on the ground, struggling, striking, kicking, tearing at each other's

Digitized by Google

clothes in their efforts to get a better hold, and rolling nearer and nearer to the water.

"Help!" screamed the woman. "Help! Help!! Murder!!! Help!!!!"

She bent down over them and tried to pry Murdock's hands loose from the other's throat. She tugged at his tunic, to drag him off, and tore a long, irregular strip from it. But Murdock clung to his man's throat with his left hand, and pounded him savagely between the eyes with his right fist.

The girl, still screaming "Murder!" picked up a stone, and hammered on Murdock's head with it. The blow half stunned him for the moment, and his antagonist took immediate advantage of it. He all but worried free.

Murdock rose to his knees to get a better purchase on him. They struggled and panted and struck and swore between clenched teeth for a second longer, on the very verge of the pond. Suddenly the new arrival managed to seize a stone himself. He struck Murdock with it, straight between the eyes, and pushed him with the other hand. And, just as the girl's screams were answered by shouts and the sound of hurrying footsteps, Murdock toppled over into the water and lay there.

He was in the act of struggling out again, bleeding and half-stunned, when the park-keeper arrived.

"What's this?" the park-keeper demanded. "What's doing here?"

HE STOOPED and pulled Murdock up on the bank. Before either man could answer him there came another shout from the near distance, and the noise of another man crashing through the bracken.

"This way!" shouted the keeper. "This way! Over here!"

"All right!" came an answering voice. "I'm coming!"

"Now!" said the keeper. "What's been happening?"

The tall, lean man answered him, holding his right hand to a broken nose, and panting so that he could hardly speak. Murdock was altogether too far gone for the moment to find any breath for words.

"This lady here 's a friend of mine! I came here to meet her. I heard her call for help, and I came running. I found this soldier in the act of assaulting her. He had hold of her wrist, and was trying to drag her off. So, I struck him, and threw him in the pond!"

"Liar!" panted Murdock; but that was all he could say, for his breath was gone, and no one took any notice of him.

"What was she doing in the park at this time of night?" asked the keeper, "and how does she come to be all wet?"

"Why she was in the park is nobody's business but hers and mine! I don't know why she is wet. I haven't had time to ask her. I suspect he threw her in!"

The girl had sat down on the bench, huddled up and shivering. The keeper caught hold of the sleeve of Murdock's tunic, and half pulled, half pushed him toward the girl. Before he reached her, though, the man who had been shouting crashed through the bracken, and stopped, panting, in their midst.

"What's wrong?" he spluttered. "Anybody murdered? I heard screams for help as I was on my way home through the park. Who's hurt? Anybody?"

"This soldier," said the keeper, "is charged with assaulting this lady here. Looks like a case of attempted robbery!"

George Christopher, at the sound of the man's voice, had slipped behind the huge bulk of the keeper, and made himself as inconspicuous as possible. But the newcomer drew nearer to him, and peered right into his face.

"Ha!" he exclaimed—maliciously, it sounded, almost. "I identify this man! He's in the East Surrey Regiment. His name's Murdock—George Christopher Murdock!"

"How d'you come to know him?" asked the keeper, suspiciously.

"He's been courting my daughter, much against my will, I may tell you! They're a low-down, dissolute lot, these soldiers! My name's Blakely—Thomas Blakely, 333 A, High Street, Richmond—the ham-and-beef shop three doors from the new church. I identify him!"

"Well—you've all got to come along o' me!" said the keeper. "There's a policeman on fixed-point duty at the gate. I'll have to hand the whole case over to him. Come on. We've wasted time enough!"

Then Murdock lost his head. The concatenation of events had been too much for him. He was bewildered, indignant, injured, half full of muddy water and,

Digitized by Google

now that his rage was dying down, scared out of his wits.

He tore his arm loose from the keeper and, without a word in explanation or self-defense, took to his heels and ran.

He never stopped once to look behind him. He did not know whether he was being followed, and he did not care. He ran and ran and ran, until his sides ached, and his breath came short, and fire seemed to go streaming past his eyes.

He had lost his Susie and the ham-and-beef shop. He had lost the G. C. M. For surely, now that he had been recognized by Susie's father, he would be reported and charged with the Lord alone knew what. He had ruined his tunic, and would have to buy a new one. He would be laughed at by Smiley Simpson, and he would probably be late in barracks! He ran—and ran—and ran; more to get away from his own thoughts than with any idea of getting back in time.

He slipped through the Kingston Gate, tore down the long hill to the right and reached the barracks. The gate was shut! He leaned, half-fainting, against the wicket gate, and tugged at the bell.

"Who goes there?" demanded the corporal of the guard.

Murdock was too exhausted to reply.

The gate opened about six inches, and the corporal's face peered through the opening.

"Ho! Murdock, is it! Drunk too, or I'm a Dutchman! So we've caught you with the goods at last, eh? Come along in!"

Murdock reeled along the narrow passage, with the corporal helping him.

"I'm not drunk, corporal," he panted. "I've had an accident."

"So I see!" said the corporal. "'Alf a dozen of 'em, judging by the look of you!"

They reached the guard-room, where the corporal opened a big book that stood ready on a ledge, and read out, as he wrote:

"Private Murdock—D Company — absent after hours without leave—drunk—tunic torn and dirty—face bleeding—apparently been fighting."

"I tell you I'm not drunk——"

"Drunk and argumentative!" corrected the corporal.

"You mutton-headed fool!" panted George Christopher. "Can't you listen?"

"That'll do!" said the corporal. "Drunk and disorderly, and using improper language! Shove 'im in the guard-room, boys!"

So, indignant and expostulating and dizzy from his exertions, Private George Christopher Murdock was seized by the shoulders and pushed into a four-square, empty room, where the door was slammed on him.

III

COLONEL STRATHSAY sat at the orderly-room table, chewing the end of a penholder discontentedly and conning the list of "crimes" he had to deal with. Like every other commanding officer, he hated those nine-o'clock-each-morning scenes, when the defaulters of his regiment were brought up before him to be tried and punished. This morning a good-conduct man's name was on the list. In addition to that, he had just received an extraordinary telegram, and was wondering what under heaven it might mean.

He had barely had time, though, to think of five thousand different possibilities, when an orderly came in in a hurry, saluted and handed him a note.

He tore the note open with trembling fingers, and dropped his eyeglass.

"Adjourn for an hour!" he said to the officer beside him, who stooped to pick up the monocle. "Don't try any cases in my absence!"

Being a widower, he had quarters in the barracks, and he headed straight for them as fast as his long thin legs could carry him. He was stopped, though, before he had gone half-way.

A park-keeper, in blue uniform with silver buttons, and a man who looked like a tradesman, intercepted him.

"Your pardon, sir!" said the park-keeper, "but one o' your men—George Christopher Murdock by name—was caught assaulting a lady in the park last night, with intent to rob her. Mr. Blakely, here, has come to identify him, and this here," holding up a ragged piece of crimson cloth, "is off his tunic. The police said they'd be over here this morning to see about it."

"You'd better wait for me in the guard-room," said the Colonel. "I'll be back there presently. Who's this?"

A girl came running in through the gateway, and stopped bewildered, as though wondering what to do next.

Digitized by Google

"My daughter, sir," said the man introduced as Blakely. "She's got no business to be here!"

"Then send her away!" said the Colonel, stalking on.

But Susie had already got wind of the trouble that George Christopher was in, and she clung to her father's arm and refused to be sent away.

"If you give any evidence against him," she said, "I've got a right to hear it—and contradict it, if I see fit!"

The Colonel entered his quarters and was met face to face by Mrs. Haviland—pale-faced and perturbed, but dignified.

"My dear Colonel," she said, without wasting any time on preliminaries, "I've got some dreadfully bad news for you! How it could have happened to a girl staying in my house is beyond my imagination, but somebody is to blame and, for the time being, at all events, I must take it on myself. Your daughter Kitty has been nervous and a little strange ever since she first came to stay with me. I put it down to ill-health, but it now seems that she has had a love-affair all this time, and that she had arranged an elopement for last night! She slipped out of my house, some time after dark, and went to wait for this person in Richmond Park, and there she had an extraordinary adventure."

"Wait a minute!" said the Colonel. "Who's the man?"

"I can't tell you, except that he's apparently an impostor. He says his name is Captain Delavere, but I've looked in the 'Army List' and 'The Peerage' and 'The County Gentleman,' and I can't find any mention of him. I'm certain he's never been inside my house, and he must have met her when she was on her way to one of her classes."

"Go on!" said the Colonel. "That seems probable. Young girls have no business to go backward and forward unaccompanied!"

Mrs. Haviland winced perceptibly at the rebuke, but managed to keep her temper and continue:

"IT SEEMS that the man was late in turning up, and while she waited—two hours it seems!—Kitty began to realize the dreadfulness of her position. She has always been nervous, and even light-headed at times, and she was so obsessed by loneliness and a sense of disgrace that she determined to end her life! Yes, my dear Colonel, I'm telling you the bald truth. She confessed everything to me this morning."

"Where is she now?" asked the Colonel.

"In bed in my house, where she ought to be. She has a bad cold."

"Where's the man?"

"Heaven knows! A policeman brought her home. I've never set eyes on this Captain Delavere, that I know of, in my life. But almost the most extraordinary part of it is yet to come. A common soldier—a 'private' I believe you call them—happened to be passing at the time, and caught sight of her just as she plunged into a pond. It seems he plunged in and dragged her out again. I can't make head or tail of her account of what happened after that, but there seems to have been a fight. This man Delavere turned up two hours late, and either resented the private's action, or else the private insulted him, and they fought until the park-keeper came. Then, it seems, the private ran away. I can't understand it, but there the story is, for what it's worth!"

"It's a perfectly amazing story!" said the Colonel. "We ought to be able to lay our finger on the private, at all events. Didn't she, or the park-keeper, recognize his uniform?"

"I haven't heard that anybody did."

"And you don't know what happened to this alleged Delavere person?"

"I've no idea, and I didn't wait to inquire. I hurried over here to inform you of what had happened."

"Quite right, Mrs. Haviland. Quite right! Dear me! This is a most unfortunate piece of business."

The door-bell rang and, after a moment, there came a knock on the inner door.

"Come in!" said the Colonel, and his soldier-servant entered.

"A policeman wants to see you, sir!" he announced.

"Show him in!"

The sound of regulation boots was heard along the passage. A moment later a blue uniform darkened the door, and a huge policeman entered, helmet in hand.

"What is it?" asked the Colonel.

The policeman produced his official memorandum-book and opened it.

"We've a man under arrest in Richmond,

Digitized by Google

sir, known as Charlie Sheers, alias Captain Charles Delavere, alias Jim the Joiner, alias—he's got a string of aliases about a yard long. He was arrested last night at Richmond Park Gate by the man on fixed-point duty, who happened to recognize him, and knew there was a warrant out against him. He's wanted on a charge of forgery. There's a private here in your regiment, by the name of George Christopher Murdock, D Company, who's able to identify him more or less. Delavere, to use his last known name, wanted to lay a charge against the private of assault and battery, but he wouldn't give his name, nor the name of the lady who was with him. The park-keeper wouldn't let him go, though, until he'd given his own name and address, and while he was writin' it down the constable recognized him. So he sent for another constable to see the lady home—she wouldn't give her name either, but said she lived at Mrs. Haviland's on the Hill—and then he arrested him. I'm sent to see this private, if you'll allow me, and find out what he knows about the whole business. We want to know what the lady was doin' in the park, an' how she came to be wet, and what the assault amounted to. The man we've got in custody is bruised all over pretty nearly, and in the doctor's hands."

"How did you find out the private's name?" asked the Colonel.

"From a man name o' Blakely, who identified him on the spot. Have you a private, name o' Murdock, in D Company o' your regiment, sir?"

"Yes," said the Colonel. "I'll let you see him, if you'll wait outside a few minutes. I think I begin to see the light!"

"Who's that?" asked Mrs. Haviland suddenly, pointing through the window.

"The daughter of that man standing near her," answered the Colonel. "That's all I know about her, except that I told him to send her away just now."

"Why, she's my nursemaid!" said Mrs. Haviland.

"We'll have her in here," said the Colonel, "and find out what she knows!"

SO SUSIE BLAKELY was brought in by an orderly, and cross-examined, and re-cross-examined, first by the Colonel, and then by Mrs. Haviland. At first she stoutly maintained that she knew nothing. But after nearly twenty minutes of insistent questioning she broke down and tearfully admitted that she had known all about the projected elopement, and that the "Captain" had given her five pounds as an inducement to hold her tongue.

"Well, you'll give that five pounds to charity!" snapped Mrs. Haviland determinedly. "You're a deceitful little minx, and I hardly know what to say to you!"

"Why did you come here to-day?" demanded the Colonel.

"To find out what was going to happen to George Murdock," she answered, "I saw my father this morning for a minute, when he passed Mrs. Haviland's house at seven o'clock, and he told me George was in trouble. So I came!"

"Um-m-m!" said the Colonel. "He's certainly in trouble. When did you see him last?"

"Last night, sir, at nine o'clock, when he brought me home."

"Was he drunk, or sober?"

"Sober, sir!"

"Quite?"

"Quite sober, sir."

"Did his breath smell of drink?"

Susie blushed.

"No, sir!" she answered; and the Colonel laughed.

"Well, from what I know of Murdock, he couldn't get drunk within a space of two hours and a half unless he was drinking hard all the time. And that, it seems, he can't possibly have been doing. He's charged at present with being drunk last night. I don't think that charge will stand. We'll see! If you'll excuse me, Mrs. Haviland, I'm wanted in the orderly-room."

On the way to the orderly-room again, the Colonel stopped and cross-questioned Blakely and the park-keeper and, when he had done with them, he strutted off with an expression on his face that not even the oldest soldier in his regiment could have read and understood. It was cryptic; half-worried, half-amused—and quite convinced.

IV

WITH an untouched loaf of bread beside him on the bench, in a nice white cell, ten feet by eight, and faced by an iron grille through which the sun shone to disconcert him, sat Private

Digitized by Google

George Christopher Murdock, with his head between his hands. His sensations were nothing short of damnable. He would have thought he was recovering from a nightmare but for the condition of his tunic and the bruises on his face and body.

Outside, on the flagstones, with his gleaming bayonet fixed, and in full, immaculate marching-order, Murdock's bosom friend Smiley Simpson paced up and down on guard. Twenty-five paces to the right, and about turn; twenty-five paces to the left, and about turn; up and down, up and down his footsteps rang upon the clean white stones with damnable monotony, until he halted for his regulation minute's pause, and his rifle-butt came down with a thud in front of Murdock's door.

"G. C. M!" he said in a raucous whisper, the moment he was unobserved. "George Christopher Murdock! Good Conduc' Medal! Haw-haw!"

Then he raised his rifle to the "slope," and once more resumed his steady tramp.

Murdock affected to take no notice of him, but swore softly to himself between his swollen, battered lips. Things looked gloomy enough for him in all conscience, without the added sting of Smiley's sarcasm. But he had not heard the end of what friend Smiley had to say, yet, by any means. The footsteps advanced and receded along the flagstones, and presently Smiley came to a halt again, and stood at ease.

"'Ow about the 'am-an'-beef shop?" he inquired, with exaggerated concern.

"You go to ——!" snarled Murdock, not by any means in form for ingenious repartee.

"Haw-haw!" said Smiley, and resumed his tramp.

The next time that he halted he had news for him.

"There's a cove just come in by name o' Blakely!" he whispered. "Says 'e owns a 'am-an'-beef shop, an' 'e wants to identify a private o' this 'ere reg'ment! Ever 'ear of 'im?"

Murdock glowered through the grille like a caged, mad animal, but made no answer. The words he would have used were all jammed together in his throat and stuck there.

"There's a gal come now!" said Smiley, during his next short interval of rest. "She's talkin' to the Colonel. She's put 'er arm through Blakely's—reckon she'll be 'is daughter! She's a pretty gal. My eye! I'll bet she's come to give yer back all them presents what you promised 'er!"

This was worse and worse! That his best and only girl should see him in this condition, and on the occasion of his first acquaintance with the cells in fourteen years, was too much to be borne! He could have wept, if all the tears in him had not been stanched by the rigors of a soldier's life.

What had he done, he wondered, that malign fate should pile all this on him? He had done his level best to play the game the night before. It must be the giving up the drink, he thought. Nothing as bad as this, or half as bad, had ever happened to him so long as he had satisfied his thirst. He supposed that a thirst was given to a man for the definite purpose of being quenched, and that now he was being punished for opposing one of nature's laws!

"S' 'elp me——!" he muttered to himself. "When I gets out o' this, I'll make up for lost time, I will! I'll keep that perishin' canteen-sergeant that busy startin' fresh bungs that 'e'll sweat 'isself pretty near blue in the face! Watch out!"

He felt he was going mad. He was smothered, tortured, helpless, beneath a sense of outraged innocence!

"I'll never do a decent thing again!" he swore to himself. "I'll get into cells reg'lar, an' stop in cells until my time's expired! An' if ever I sees a gal in trouble again, I'll set right down an' laugh at 'er! An' if all the perishin' women in the bloomin' world wants to drown their bloomin' selves, I'll stand by an' watch 'em do it!"

HIS reflections were interrupted by the sergeant-major, who opened the door with a tremendous rattling of keys, and a more tremendous dignity.

"Come on!" he growled. "Out o' this! Look sharp!"

George Christopher rose painfully and followed him. He was marched—filthy and disheveled and ashamed—right under the eyes of his beloved and her father to the orderly-room, and pushed into his place in front of the table where the Colonel sat.

The Colonel did not even look up at him at first, and for that much George Christopher was grateful.

Digitized by Google

A man who is fixed as Murdock was has reason to be grateful if his Commanding Officer refrains from looking at him. He had two black eyes and a bruised and swollen nose. His lips were cut, his face was black and blue all over and his tunic was fit for nothing better than the rag-heap. From his heels to the top of his tousled mop of hair, he was a mass of mud and caked-on slush and, though he had done his best in the guard-room to remove some of the traces of the fight, his efforts had only served to make him look even worse.

The Colonel coughed, and the sergeant-major reeled the charges off:

"Drunk and disorderly, sir—absent after hours without leave—having his side-arms and accouterments in a dirty condition—using improper language to the corporal of the guard!"

Then the Colonel looked up, and Murdock blanched before him.

"I've one thing to ask you," said the Colonel, "before I dismiss your case! Do you happen to know the name of the lady whom you pulled out of the water last night?"

Murdock was almost too amazed to answer. Dismiss the case? Was he drunk, or asleep, or what? He managed, though, to pull himself together sufficiently to answer before the Colonel needed to repeat the question.

"No, sir!"

"Do you need to know it?"

Even in his dazed condition Murdock could read what was implied by that.

"None o' my business, sir!" he answered.

"Quite right!" said the Colonel. "Then I'll make the cost of your new tunic my business!"

He opened a drawer, produced two ten-pound notes and handed them to Murdock.

"You're confined to barracks, of course, until your face is in a presentable condition; but—er—there will be nothing entered on your charge-sheet. I—er—notice that you've nearly fourteen years' good service. Ah—er—this incident will not—ah—stand in the way of your being recommended for the Good Conduct Medal—ah—in fact—ah—quite the contrary. No! No thanks! You've earned it!"

"Fall away!" said the sergeant-major, and Private George Christopher Murdock fell away, too bewildered to speak.

HE FELL away into the sunshine of the barrack-yard outside, and almost fell into the arms of Susie, who was waiting for him.

She embraced him, right there before the soldiers, carefully choosing a place between the bruises; and the ham-and-beef expert actually shook hands with him.

"Lord love a duck! What's happened?" asked George Christopher, gazing about him, like a man awakening from a dream.

"You've just about won your G. C. M.!" said Susie, holding on to him.

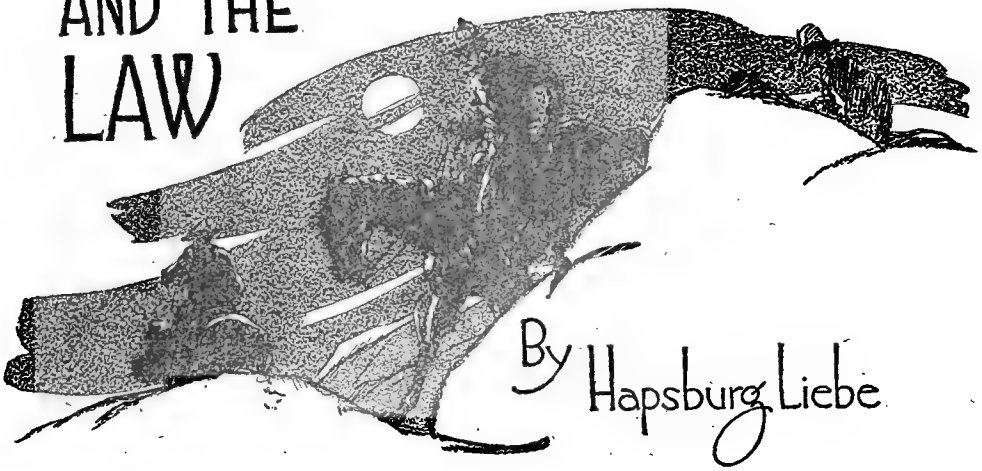
And, pacing up and down along the flagstones by the cells, Private Smiley Simpson all but dropped his rifle.

"Well, of all the wonders in the world!" he muttered. "'Ere the old blighter gets put in cells, for a rollin', fightin', paralytic drunk, an' the Colonel sends for 'im, an' —— strike me perishin' purple-crimson-pink, if that blighter's perishin' dawg's luck ain't the bleedin' limit! Look! She's kissin' 'im! An' 'er father's shakin' 'ands! Talk about an 'unch! Lord love an' look at 'im!"

His vocabulary failed him after that, and he resumed his pacing to and fro, in silent, stricken, open-mouthed amazement at the supernatural.

Digitized by Google

BLACK VIPER AND THE LAW



By Hapsburg Liebe

"YOU, Dick and Logan! You, Lyd and Nancy! Who? That's old Hip McDonald. Yes, that big man under the broad, dove-colored hat, him with the pointed gray mustaches and the Southern colonel's goatee. Hip McDonald, United States Marshal. He was christened 'John Charles,' but the bad men of this part of the wild and woolly nicknamed him 'Hip' on account of his shooting from the hip and being as quick as powder on the draw."

Eleazer Mott caught the lash of his whip and held the stock at rest on the dash-board of the old-fashioned stage-coach.

"I've never heard of McDonald before," remarked the man who sat beside old Eleazer, and who shortly before had interrupted the ex-plainsman.

"Well," smiled Mott, "you're green to this part of the earth if you've never heard of Hip McDonald. Stranger, Hip is not only the representative of the law here—he's the law itself. And he's as white a man as ever listened to the yap of a coyote, too. A little Scotch, and big-hearted; and when he gets mad, it's funny to hear him repeat himself in his talk. And, stranger, he's as keen as the knife that shaved the hair off of a sleeping mouse without waking said rodent. Now there was Abner Peele, who styled himself 'Black Viper'—well, do you want me to tell you about it?"

YELLOW CREEK, being just a little mining-village in the new gold country, used to be pretty wild—and I reckon it ain't what you'd call with a clear conscience an annex to paradise yet, to be real truthful. Hip McDonald and me was sitting in the Red Violet—saloon and hotel combined, it was—one evening, when a cowman from the Cross-Bar, with a blue-lipped bullet-hole in his arm, rode up to the door and almost fell from his hoss. This fellow had been regarded as a pretty scary piece of humanity, being part tenderfoot, and most of us laughed when he wailed,

"Bandit—said he was named 'Black Viper.' Shot me when I tried to draw and took both o' my brand-new guns!"

He had turned clean white at the memory of the occurrence, which was what had tickled our funny-bones.

But Hip McDonald didn't seem to see anything especially humorous in it. He turned on us with a heavy frown, and told us that if it was the *real* Black Viper the cowboy had seen, we'd laugh out of the other sides of our mouths before very long.

Digitized by Google

"Yes," says Hip, not losing any time, but busy at tying up the wounded man's arm, "if it's Abner Peele, you'll all be makin' new bars for your doors at night. Abner Peele called himself 'Black Viper,' and there was more truth than romance in it—take that from me, boys."

And then, having tied the last knot in the cowman's bandage, old Hip draws from his pocket a card with the picture of a man and some reading on it. I was lookin' over his shoulder, and I seen it plain, reading and all. The face looked like a starved Indian's; the eyes was dark and piercing, seeming like a pair of bullets coming straight at you; he had long black mustaches, and his long black hair showed tangled and uneven under a ragged felt hat pinned up in front.

I've finished my third score of years, and I've never seen as vile and wicked a face as that. Now how do you reckon they managed to get his picture? Why, he'd sent it to a certain sheriff with his compliments!

"Abner Peele, calls himself 'Black Viper,' " says the reading. "Age, about thirty-seven. Slender and very dark. Weight, about 160. Very white teeth. Limp in right leg from old bullet-wound. Very quick with firearms. Expert shot." All of which description had been sent to the sheriff along with the photograph! And the reading went on to state that, on account of a few misdemeanors in the hold-up and murder line, there was a reward out for Black Viper, with what you might call a non-restrictive dead-or-alive clause attached.

Hip showed the picture to the man from the Cross-Bar.

"That's him—that's sure him!" exclaims the cowman. "Why, I'd know that face a thousand years from now. You fellows that laughed," he goes on, chiding us like, "will regret it if ever you see them black eyes staring at you over the hole in the business end of a .45, or I'm a blamed poor judge."

Hip nodded, and faced Jim Elversett, proprietor of the Red Violet.

"Jim," says he, "that man Peele is so low-down, pizen mean that his breath would wilt cabbage. If I die without arresting him, I'll die mighty bad dissatisfied. He's taunted me, and roasted me, until there's no peace for me except by catching him.

"There's two men I want especially; one is Black Viper, and the other is a big, heavy man named Sorreltop Bucksby—Sorreltop, however, ain't his real name; it was applied to him on account of his head bein' as red as a turkey's nose. I was expecting both these men to show up in this section; that's what I'm doing here, Jim. I caught all the members of both bands—all but the chiefs.

"And Jim," Hip goes on, twisting at his gray mustaches, "better keep your cash hid at nights, because the favorite hold-up of both Peele and Bucksby is a saloon. And keep this with it," he adds, handin' over a big pocketbook filled with papers. "I'm right now about to start after Black Viper, Jim," says he, "and I don't want to be burdened with anything but shootin'-irons, grub and water. You see, I want to get to work before Bucksby and Peele organize bands."

"Sure," says Jim, taking charge of the article in mention.

HIP cleaned and oiled the two big blued Colts and the short Winchester rifle he always carried, took some things to eat and a couple of canteens of water, mounted a lank roan hoss he loved like a sweetheart and headed toward the hills in which the cowman had met Black Viper.

Now Mr. John Charles Hip McDonald didn't expect to find the bandit at the scene of the hold-up, of course. He reasoned that he'd be lucky if he even got the direction Peele had taken when he rode away. Hip had planned to roost on high pinnacles and watch for a man by day and a campfire by night.

It was Peele's custom, you see, to lay low in the hills after each hold-up, big or little, until people formed the opinion that he'd gone for good.

So Hip stayed out there, doing duty day and night, until his water and grub had all faded, and still no sign of his man. Then he rode back to Yellow Creek for news and supplies.

He looked gaunt and hungry as he stepped into the door of the Red Violet.

"By George," says Jim Elversett, who was fairly boiling over with eagerness to get his budget of information out of his system, "by George, Hip, Peele has done been here and robbed me, relieving me also

Digitized by Google

of the responsibility of keeping your pocketbook, while you was gone. Last night it was, to be authentic. The miners got together and chased him to the Tenville road, and there lost track of him. He left a note for you, Hip, I believe."

And Jim hands the surprised McDonald a soiled bit of paper. Hip snatches it quick and reads this love letter:

Seeing that you was busy on pinnacle duty, I decided to do a little job in your absence. I could have killed you, Hip, while you was sleeping under that little ledge. But considered you perfectly harmless. Knowed it would take a little of the interest out of the game, so I spared you.

It was signed simply, "Black Viper." Moreover, it had been stuck to Jim's front door with a scarf-pin taken from Hip McDonald's tie while he slept. This, of course, proved that Peele had really had a chance to kill the officer.

It made Mr. John Charles McDonald so mad that he couldn't talk for two whole minutes. He didn't allow any discount for the chance to kill him that Peele had let go. The slur against his official honor, him who had so long been a terror to bad men, was too much.

"Oh, but I'll get him. I will!" he roars, each hand itching to use its trigger-finger. "I'll not lose the chance he lost, I won't. By ——, Jim, he says I amuse him—ain't that it, Jim? Well, I'll amuse him some more; that's the guess of old Hip McDonald, by ——, and you can sure bank that it's a good guess. Yes, Jim Elversett, he's yet got the big show to see. It lies in the chambers of these two guns."

We urged McDonald to spend the night in Yellow Creek, seeing that he was all fagged out, and make a fresh start in the mornin'. To this be grudgingly agreed.

The surprisingly sensible gist of the cross-table and bar-rail confidences that night was that Abner Peele had got to be too sure of himself; that he had wore off the novelty of being a much feared man; that his unsettled system required something more as a sort of stimulant—and that for this latter he had chose the rather foolish expedient of taunting Hip McDonald.

WHILE Hip held a light drink raised, and was saying a health to us, there come a bullet from the darkness across the creek, smashing the glass in his hand and splatterin' the contents of same in his face—and anybody who ever drunk sin-bitters at the Red Violet knows that the best Jim keeps ain't quite the class a man wants used for a complexion-wash or an eye-tonic!

"Here I am—come and get me!" cries a laughing, daring voice, teasing-like, from the same spot from which had come the bullet of a few seconds before. It was the voice of Black Viper, and it sure sounded like the hiss of a snake.

There was two lights in the barroom. A big, blued gun flashed from each of McDonald's hips. There followed the rattling of shattered lamp-chimneys, and the room was made as dark as the Pit. Hip was taking no chances. And that's some shooting, two aims at once.

Then we heard Hip's soft footsteps fly across the floor and strike the sand outside. After that come silence.

We crowded to the door. The night was clear and starry, but there wasn't the sign of a moon, and the shanties looked mighty dim and shadowy. A minute later we seen the flash of a pistol about fifty yards beyond the creek, which was answered by another flash, and another, fully a hundred yards off. The first shot had been McDonald's. The second and third had been fired by Abner Peele as he run toward his hoss.

As Black Viper become visible in crossing the crest of the rise, Hip loosened up on him again. There was no answerin' shot. All was as still as the grave.

Five minutes later, United States Marshal John Charles McDonald walked heavy into the Red Violet, which was now lit up again, and put the rag-like body of Abner Peele the Black Viper on the floor!

II

WE seen then that old Hip had been shot too. There was a hole in his left arm, from which a solid stream of red poured. Jim Elversett jerked a wide blue handkerchief from the neck of a bystander and wound it tight about the arm of the Marshal, thereby stopping the bleeding.

Upon turning to the bandit, we noted that Hip's bullet had struck him in the back of the head, and that his tangled black hair was soaked with blood. We

Digitized by Google

put the body in a little back room, handling it kind of touchy like—for Black Viper, even in that condition, made us feel a bit queer.

"I got him, didn't I, Jim?" says Hip, rather weak. It was plain that he regretted having to take a man's life, however, in spite of his boasting manner. "I told you I'd get him, didn't I, boys? I reckon, Jim, he's been amused for the last time; I reckon he's seen—the—big show——"

Black Viper's bullet had cost him lots of blood and, although he was a man with nerves like iron, he reeled and staggered with a sudden dizziness.

It was the luckiest thing that ever happened at Yellow Creek, I always thought, that there was a prospector stopping there who had been a doctor, and who had with him some doctor-tools. He cared for the old Marshal in a masterful way.

The following morning we dug a grave below the village, in the little plot where we'd planted all the deceased of Yellow Creek, and some of the miners knocked up a rough box for the body of the outlaw. I agreed, after lots of pressing, to say a little prayer at the grave. I didn't feel that I'd been a good enough man to take charge of such a carrying on. But there was no parson in reach at the time, and I was the oldest person to be had, and so I reckoned that I'd just have to do it.

I was sitting at a little table in the barroom, just finishing the writing out of the ceremonies concerning the closing chapter in the book of life pertaining to Mr. Abner Peele, when Jim Elversett appeared at my elbow and told me the miners was waiting. I looked around, and seen the box setting in the bright sunlight outside.

Jim then walked to the door of the little back room and opened it, with me in arm's reach of him.

The only thing we saw that even reminded us of Black Viper was this inscription which had been wrote with a pencil on the unfastened and swinging window-shutter:

Save the grave and the box, Hip. You're going to need them.

The funeral-rites of Mr. Abner Peele fluttered from my hand to the floor. It was several seconds before we recovered sufficient to discuss the most extraordinary occurrence of the dead coming to life and walking away.

Jim Elversett spoke first.

"Well, I'll be eternally——" but I'm too old a man to repeat such talk as Jim used.

Somebody told Hip about it. He got out of his bed, in spite of the prospector-doctor, and hurried to the scene of the disaster. I declare to you, stranger, I thought Hip McDonald would go into convulsions.

"Well, by ——!" bellows Hip, in a voice no sick man would rightly assume, "and if that ain't the luck of an ugly man's dog! Jim Elversett," says he, "if this is a joke, by ——, I'll arrest you for leased majesty! Say, look here, Jim, you'd better relieve my mind instantly, you had better, sir; and I mean it, Jim, I do, by ——! Tell it, Jim—well, can't you talk, you bust-head, you!"

"Joke—thunder," smiles Jim, weak like. "The joke is that your bullet, Hip, only hit him hard enough to knock the consciousness out of him for an hour or such a matter—glanced off, you know. You being hurt, Hip, made us careless in the way of making examinations."

"Yes," I puts in, "he come to in this little back room, wrote off the inscription you see there, and skipped. So, Hip," I says, "I guess you'll get to amuse him yet a while longer."

"So I'll need the box and the hole in the ground, will I?" growls Hip, some quieter. "Well, Jim," says he, "we'll save the box and the hole in the ground, and see who is put in 'em. I ain't going to rest, Jim, until I've got Abner Peele. You can bank on that, for it's the truth or I'm a grasshopper!"

Well, by the time Hip had got well enough to stand the hot sunshine, a number of things had happened. A stage had been held up by Black Viper and three other men, which proved that Black Viper had started up another band, and a scary sort of a notice had been posted on the door of the Red Violet, defying Hip and all his kind—same being signed up "Sorreltop Bucksby!"

"HIP," says Jim Elversett, as the old Marshal folded the note and put it in his pocket, "you need a posse. Them fellows will get together as sure as you ain't a grasshopper, and they'll do for you. Why," Jim says, "it'll be the worst band you ever heard tell of!"

"I want one more man," says Hip McDonald, "besides myself. I want a man

Digitized by Google

that I can send out to join Black Viper's bunch and use his own judgment as to chances. I wish I knowed where I could pick up a fellow right quick for the job."

At this a newcomer at the mining-camp stepped up and put his hand on McDonald's arm.

"My name's Bill Rutherford," says this newcomer, "and I just heard you say you wanted somebody to send out to join Black Viper's band and help anywhere he seen a chance. I want the job."

Hip looked Rutherford up and down, sideways and every other way.

"Well," says Hip, "you've *got* the job."

He adds, "You work that end of it, and do all you can to keep Peele from finding out that Sorreltop Bucksby is in the State. I'll work the Bucksby bunch in disguise. You see, I couldn't well disguise myself so that Peele wouldn't know me, because Peele is mighty sharp."

"I've got you," says Rutherford.

"Then out to find Peele and join him," orders Hip.

Rutherford got Hip to furnish him a hoss, and rode into the hills.

Away back, some twenty miles from Yellow Creek, Rutherford come upon Black Viper and his band. Peele had chose one of the finest spots in the world as a place of refuge. It was a sort of a cave-like place in the side of a great, rocky hill, and a person who had never seen it could hardly have found the way to it.

Peele was sitting at a little smokeless fire, eating his supper, when Rutherford come riding up. Peele rose to this feet and grinned at Rutherford.

"Well," says Peele, "did you find out anything about McDonald's plans?"

"Ha, Ab," answers Rutherford, "I reckon I did. He hired me to come out and join you, and work for his interests. And, say—Sorreltop Bucksby is somewhere in this section."

"By all that's holy!" jubilates Peele. "We'll join him, Bill. We ought to make the finest band that ever wore masks! Bucksby, I've always heard, is as nervy as they get to be. How did you find it out?"

Rutherford told him about the note McDonald had found stuck to the door of the Red Violet.

"It's lucky for you that Hip McDonald didn't recognize you," says Peele, grinning and showing his white teeth. "But," he adds, "I reckon McDonald knows nothing about you."

"Hip is goin' to work the Bucksby bunch," says Rutherford, "while I'm workin' you."

At this Peele shows his white teeth again in a big smile. Then Rutherford sits down and begins to eat, being some hungry with his weariness. Peele and the other two, a pair of brothers named Falway, big, dark fellows, also sits down, and the four cutthroats lays plans for finding Sorreltop Bucksby the next day.

So, when the night had passed and the mornin' broke, the four bandits rode toward Yellow Creek, on the lookout for two things—spoils and Sorreltop Bucksby's band. And, knowing that old Hip McDonald was pretty shrewd, Peele give his men orders to watch for the disguised Marshal among the Bucksbyites.

"I've played with Hip long enough," Peele tells Rutherford, as they ride along through the mesquite and sage, their hosses loose-reined and picking the way to suit themselves. "I'm goin' to suggest to Sorreltop that we run Hip out of the State, the first move."

Rutherford chuckles, for Rutherford, while maybe he wasn't as case-hardened to crime as Peele, was a mighty conscienceless man.

"Why not plant him in that box and hole they made for you in Yellow Creek?" says he. "It might save trouble in the future."

"Good idee," agrees Black Viper, "good idee, Bill. We'll do that same thing."

"And shoot up Yellow Creek," says one of the Falways.

"And shoot up Yellow Creek," grins Abner Peele, patting the two new guns he'd took from the Cross-Bar cowman.

Well, along in the afternoon, the four run smack up on four other men, all on hosses, and all well armed. Three of these was slim, sunburned, lanky fellows. The other one, the man in the lead, was heavy, brown-skinned, and as redheaded as a human being ever gets to be. He was smooth-faced, and his jaw was big and square. His eyes was cold and gray, and as sharp as a pair of spears.

"Sorreltop Bucksby, by all that's holy!" cries Black Viper, with a grin that showed all his white teeth. "How are you, Red, old hoss?"

"Abner Peele, otherwise knowed as the

Digitized by Google

'Black Viper', or I ain't a foot high!" exclaims Red. "I was just lookin' for you, me and my three friends here. We was just thinkin' what a crackajack band the whole two outfits of us would make."

"Same with us," says Abner Peele. "We was lookin' for you, too, with idees just like yours. There's only one thing in the way, that is, which one of us will be the main gun?"

"We'll both be the main gun," smiles Red, "a double-barreled gun, so to speak. How does that catch you?"

For answer, Peele sticks out his hand. They shake, and the bargain is sealed.

"Now," says Peele, "Suppose we go to Yellow Creek, shoot up the town, and bury Hip McDonald?"

And he goes on to tell Red about the grave and the box.

"I'm with you," replies Red. "But I know of something else that ought to be done first. I got wind that there's a bunch of money in the Hartsville bank that we ought to have. I've done got the explosives. I'd have done this myself, but it was too big a job for four men—you see, there's apt to be trouble."

"Make it after night—about three o'clock in the morning," suggests Peele. "There ain't so much danger of waking the good people at that ungodly hour. What do you say to to-night?"

"I've got you," smiles Red. "I've done been in there, and I know the lay of the land, so we ought to have a snap. And, as it'll take us until three o'clock in the mornin' to ride to Hartsville, I beg to make the suggestion that we start right now."

SO the precious eight of them, all armed with revolvers and some with Winchesters, turned their hosses toward the little town that was the county-seat.

Red and Peele rode in the lead, side by side, and laughed and planned for the decease of one Hip McDonald. The other six rode three abreast, smoked, drank, swore—and also planned for the decease of one Hip McDonald.

Yes, I reckon it looked kind of gloomy for old Hip. But you wait.

The eight of them reached Hartsville at the appointed time. All was as dark as you can imagine. There wasn't a light nowhere to be seen, either in the business section or in the residence part of the little town. The streets wasn't paved anywhere, and the tramp of their hosses made no noise whatever. It was the same as if eight black ghosts was traveling.

Red and the other barrel of the double-barreled gun led their men up to a low, brick building, with Red guiding, as he knowed the town and Peele didn't. There they got off of their hosses, and one of Red's three men held the reins, while the rest of them sneaked up to the door.

"I ain't been a second-story man several years for nothing," whispers Red, and he takes a ring o' skeleton-keys from his pocket and unlocks the door, as smooth as you please! "Slip in, now, you fellows, and turn to your right—and for goodness' sake keep as still as you can."

"I'm with you," whispers Peele, and tip-toes, him and his three men, inside.

Well, the three feels their way for a few yards, in the dark, and stands still and waits on Red to follow. But Red don't follow. Instead, there comes a click from the door. And it was the click of a lock being fastened from the outside.

"By all that's holy!" says Black Viper, out loud—and makes for the door, with his three precious cutthroats at his heels. "Here, Red——"

"Don't call me Red any more, you low-down, pizen varmint, you!" calls a voice from beyond the door. "I've got you at last, you low-down sneak, you! You'll bury me in Yellow Creek, will you! Oh, but you've got the main, big show to see, you have, you bust-head, you! I amuse you, do I? I hated to shave off my beard and mustache, and dye my hair with red ink and my skin with walnut-juice, but by ——, it was worth it all, it was. You see, I knowed that man Rutherford was a spy of yours, and he done just what I wanted him to do. As for Sorreltop Bucksby—well, I'll get him later. I wrote that notice myself, for the benefit of Bill Rutherford."

"Hip McDonald," roars Peele, "you open this door, or I'll shoot it down!"

"Shoot it down, you bust-head!" bellows Hip. "Shoot it down—it and the windows too, you pizen varmint—they're all iron! You see, you're not in a bank! You're in the jail at Hartsville, you are! And you won't get a bite to eat nor a drop of water until you poke them guns out to me!"

Digitized by Google

By H. D. Couzens

TIME was when parents watched a youth anxiously to find his tendency toward an occupation, and then had him carefully schooled or apprenticed in that particular occupation.

Nowadays we do things differently. If your present occupation is distasteful, you have only to open the advertising pages of a magazine at the right place, find a coupon with a list of occupations thereon and to the right of the one you have selected mark a cross; mail the coupon, with the money to cover the first instalment and, in due time, you will know everything. And there is a wide range of occupations to choose from, including that of the art of writing fiction or the manufacture of wire nails in opposition to the trust. Which brings us to "Doggie" Tolliver.

"DOGGIE" TOLLIVER lived in San Francisco. He was a nice young man, well liked by many friends. He belonged to several clubs and had never embraced an occupation in life other than that of killing time painlessly. The state of his exchequer made it unnecessary, but to his credit be it said that he was the loudest to deplore his lack of a profession, giving as a reason that he had never found anything to his taste.

He was patient and painstaking to a degree, and when he undertook to do a thing he usually did it well. That was the reason they had named him "Doggie" at Stanford University. Only the professional could beat him playing golf at Del Monte, and at billiards and pool, both games requiring a careful study of angles and dynamics, he held several amateur records and championships.

Doggie was not strong physically, and a time came when his doctor, after a prolonged examination and much shaking of his head, explained that there were reasons why Doggie should go to Arizona at once for an indefinite stay.

"I'm not going to say you have tuberculosis, my son; but your left lung is a le-e-tle mite unsatisfactory, and if you stay here in the fog, with the late hours and cigarettes, I'll allow you only three months to develop into a genuine lunger. Pack up your traps and clear out!" The doctor was an old friend.

Settled at Phœnix, Doggie looked about for something to occupy his mind. He had been used to finding entertainment ready-made at every turn. Here he had to rely more or less on his own resources, and he was too indolent, temperamentally, to set about the business of deliberately acquiring a new set of friends. At the end of two months he wrote the doctor that he was as sound as a dollar and seriously thinking of disobeying orders and going home, to avoid boring himself to death.

Digitized by Google

WHEN, one day, as he idly turned the advertising pages of a magazine, he came upon the advertisement with the coupon in the corner. Among the courses offered was one in navigation.

Doggie sat up with a start. The sea, the sea, the open sea! In the arid waste of Arizona, swept with the hot, dry breath of the desert, far from any dampness except the town's water-supply, Doggie felt that he loved the sea. Not the gray mass of dirty brine along the coast, but the deep, mysterious blue of the broad bosom of the Pacific, as he had seen it with his own eyes from the decks of ocean liners. He had been twice to Honolulu and once to Japan, by steamer.

When his father was living the elder Tolliver had owned a fine schooner-yacht, and, as he knew nothing of the fine details of sailing it himself, he had acquired a martinet of a sailing-master. Doggie had often wondered why his father, one of the sternest and most dominating of men ashore, submitted so meekly to the bullying of his captain, until he understood that the captain, by virtue of his papers, was actually in command and, moreover, that he had a corner on all the really important knowledge on the vessel.

San Francisco Bay, and the Pacific Coast in general, have none of the yachting advantages of the Atlantic seaboard. The cruises of the *Hermione* consisted in sailing about the bay, running to Monterey and back and, at rare intervals, a run down the coast to Avalon or San Pedro. There were always guests aboard, and a great deal of entertaining was done at the ports visited. But finally Mr. Tolliver, who had no real love of the sea, sold his expensive toy to a friend who, after a season or two, grew tired in his turn; and the *Hermione* had lain, for some years, at the mercy of the weather, at Vallejo.

Doggie had been too young to take much interest in the navigation of the schooner, but he had often wondered what happened when the captain and mate peeked through the little triangles when they were offshore a bit, looked at the chronometer, made a few jottings and somehow always seemed to know just where they were on the chart.

He had inquired, to be sure, for he envied them their knowledge and skill, but the explanations always made his head ache and he had never understood one word. Memory of this, stimulated by sight of the coupon in the magazine, gave him an idea. He needed a mental tonic; he would study navigation!

He made application forthwith. In a remarkably short time he received his first month's lesson and, to his surprise, found it very clear and simple. He sent in his answers, received his second instalment with an encouraging criticism, and found it not only as lucidly simple as the first, but more interesting.

The interest progressed with each succeeding instalment. The people of the coupon knew how to teach and make the subject alluring and, as the lessons led him into the higher branches, Doggie sent to San Francisco for a sextant, nautical almanac, an epitome, charts, parallel ruler, protractor—all the paraphernalia he could think of—and buckled down to work.

He had never been so engrossed with anything in his life, and forgot entirely that he was supposed to be an invalid. He applied himself, with all his "doggishness," and took it very seriously; shooting the sun, the peak of his cap behind, in true nautical fashion; pricking off imaginary courses on the charts and working out intricate tables to the bitter end.

When the lessons were completed, he received two thick, handsome volumes; one called "Lake and Coast Navigation," which was a treatise on plane and traverse sailing; the other, "Nautical Astronomy." In both he found the text plain, simple, direct and fascinating, as the lessons had been.

They covered everything; boxing the compass to artificial horizons and sidereal sights; gave "Rules of the Road at Sea," and a complete list of all the questions likely to be asked by the board of examiners of any one applying for a certificate, with their answers.

Doggie studied them till he knew them by heart. Then he sent for more books and instruments and continued to study, for, from a hobby, the thing had grown to a passion. It was his delight to fancy himself aboard ship, his vessel in every position conceivable, in every phase of wind, current or convulsion of nature, and work her triumphantly out of difficulty and danger.

Almost a year had slipped by when he finally concluded that he had covered the whole ground—or the whole sea, as it were, and that he knew about as much of

Digitized by Google

navigation as any one living. He had learned all there was to learn, you see.

He knew every rope, sail and spar. At a sacrifice of hundreds of yards of excellent rope, he had taught himself marlinespike seamanship. He knew yachting etiquette to the last punctilious detail; how to correct a compass; and, in short, a thousand and one things few able seaman ever learn properly. And, having devoted himself particularly to the schooner-rig, knew just what to do with it in any of the emergencies described in his library. He now felt himself equipped for great things.

He was in splendid health, full of vitality and energy, and for the last few months his big idea had been maturing. He had written to a friend in San Francisco:

I want you to buy the old *Hermione* for me. Never mind the figure; pay Bullard anything he asks. Then get her on the ways. Will be home soon.

II

WITH his crates of books and elaborate outfit of instruments, Doggie returned to San Francisco and, straight as a homing pigeon, flew to the office of the Board of Harbor Commissioners.

Here he was put through a long examination, which he passed with flying colors. He did not flunk on a single question. But he was doomed to a certain disappointment. He had hoped to obtain, by virtue of his vast nautical knowledge, full master's papers for any type or class of sailing vessel. But he found that, for this, previous voyages and discharge-papers were indispensable. He was issued, instead, a limited certificate, as master of the schooner yacht *Hermione*, covering a single cruise, without privilege of carrying passengers or freight.

Doggie was somewhat chagrined, for his great idea was to take the *Hermione* for a long cruise across the Pacific as his own sailing-master, and he had hoped to do a little trading by way of added adventure.

The books had not explained this but, nevertheless, he felt considerable pride in the possession of his certificate as Captain and, in celebration, bought a number of yachting-suits and had his caps emblazoned with the owner's device—two foul anchors above the visors.

Then he set to work overhauling the *Hermione*, which was still a stanch, able vessel. He bothered the riggers, carpenters and ship-chandlers a good deal. But he felt that he knew what he was talking about, and he had his way in everything in the end. Not a thing was lacking for comfort or safety in the equipment, and meanwhile he was busy assembling a crew.

To put to sea with only tarry seamen in the forecastle and a coarse, ignorant mate for company, was not his idea. He did not quite feel equal to a long voyage under such conditions. A certain amount of congeniality was necessary. So he made a list of eligible friends, called them together and placed the case before them. Some—a small minority—were enthusiastic. Others listened gravely and explained, very politely, their gratitude and the pressing nature of their business affairs. Still others—and these were the experienced men whom Doggie had counted on—chose to be sarcastic.

"Thanks for the offer, old man," said one. "I appreciate it, but I'm quite young, you know. I haven't yet seen half the wickedness I want to. The solid earth for mine."

"You're a nice chap, Doggie," another remarked. "I like you, and you know it. Still, I don't love you enough to sacrifice my honorable career on the altar of friendship. I'm the sole support of my parents."

Some of these remarks had a depressing effect on the meeting, which broke up in disorder. But Doggie was not discouraged. He had nothing but contempt for these weak fellows and an abiding faith in himself. By taking time, he could pick his men with deliberation. With this in view, he selected parties of friends for short cruises on the *Hermione*.

A couple of old pilots whom he knew accompanied him on these trial flights for, while he felt sure of himself outside the Gate, with plenty of sea-room, he felt that he could not yet trust himself fully with the problems of a crowded anchorage.

He was proud indeed, when he stood at the wheel, or directed the working of his own vessel, and his pride increased as he grew more familiar with handling her and found all his theories working to perfection.

He seemed to have known the beautiful yacht all his life, and it gave him a glorious feeling of power and achievement. The joy of it was beyond words and, incidentally, he found himself eating and sleeping better than he had ever done in his life.

Digitized by Google

He entertained lavishly aboard, and invitations for these short cruises began to be sought for. Gradually, by weeding out the cynical and the lubbers, he picked his crew. It took a deal of time, but, when it was done, he felt that he had every reason to congratulate himself on the result. They were all good fellows, of congenial taste.

What was equally to the point, they had become excellent practical seamen, though none of them had any such aspirations as Doggie Tolliver. They could raise and lower sails and obey orders without stumbling or hesitating—as Tolliver, in extreme nautical phrase said, they could "hand, reef and steer." Many of them also possessed other accomplishments that promised to be useful on the voyage.

Charlie Harding, who owned a sloop, had cruised to Monterey and had a bald smattering of navigation, was appointed mate. Bob Elliford had once served in the Naval Militia. He was made boatswain and acting second mate, and chubby "Stuff" Elliford, his brother, who was an epicure and performed miraculous feats with a chafing-dish, was made chef and steward, though a Chinese cook, the only actual hired hand aboard, was secured for the heavy work of the galley. Tom Olson played the violin; several of the others played instruments or sang well and Arthur Westover was a mighty fisherman who had won tuna buttons at Catalina Island.

When the anchor was down or the *Hermione* moored to a dock, Doggie was a kind and charming host. On the trial cruises, it must be admitted, he was rather a martinet. He snapped out his orders, kept his crew on the jump and would have no breaches of discipline.

There was a time and place for sociability, and Doggie knew when to be austere without being truculent and, as his confidence in himself grew day by day, that of his crew increased also. They swore by and believed in him as he did in himself, and there was much poring over charts and maps and talk about pearl-islands, atolls, sun-kissed beaches, and (let us admit it) dark-eyed maidens with flowers in their hair.

IT WAS a fair October morning with the trade blowing a whole-sail breeze when the *Hermione*, in tow of a fussy little tug, dropped down the bay toward Golden Gate and the open sea. Two men, both of middle age, stood at the top of Fillmore Street Hill, watching her pass Fort Point.

"Well," said one, "they're off. Doggie's a plucky young devil. He has nerve enough to take him anywhere. I half wish I'd agreed to go with him when he asked us. Begin to believe I've got a yellow streak! It will be an interesting cruise."

The other man, who was well browned, with something of the look of the sea about him, chewed his cigar.

"Oh, it'll be interesting enough—no doubt of that. I misdoubt that I should have gone. They'll be needing some one with sense before long. Heaven help the lads! They say Providence watches over drunkards and—and," he waved his hand toward the little schooner, "and performances like that, yonder!"

Two weeks later the *Hermione* reached Honolulu and anchored in the little harbor between the lighthouse and a squat, bulldog cruiser. Fortune had been kind. Every day had been fair, with the same steady breeze, and they had had a clear reach all the way, scarcely touching the sheets during the whole two weeks. There had not been a single mishap. All were well and full of eagerness and enthusiasm, and they were scarcely to be blamed if they swaggered a trifle and talked like a crew of old salts among friends or acquaintances ashore.

As for Doggie Tolliver, he had achieved a triumph. He did not swagger, but when visiting yachtsman came aboard he accepted their praise of his fine schooner with modesty and dignity and talked expertly of his voyage. He was a captain, a sea-captain, with a splendid vessel and a broad ocean to adventure in. His theories were vindicated.

He had made a few mistakes, and profited by them. With the broad horizons, with the stimulating trade-wind in his nostrils, the sense of power and mastery had grown, and he felt that he had found his true vocation and come into his own.

They were hospitably received in Honolulu. They entertained royally on the *Hermione*, having many visitors, for they were all young men of wealth and family, and the steamers had brought word of the *Hermione*, her voyage and her crew. They were lionized a good deal and, when they bade farewell a week later, there were many

Digitized by Google

adieus waved from the boat-houses and the crew wore *leis* of flowers and an improvised quartette sang "*Aloha Oe*" as they left the harbor.

TWO days after leaving the hospitable island port they ran into a change of weather. The wind hauled round to the southeast, the sky grew heavily overcast and the horizon was lost in a brown, dirty smudge. The sea changed from its clear, deep sapphire to a dingy gray, and rose in ugly, vicious waves that slapped wickedly at the weather bow.

The wind was not heavy, but it came in quick gusts and had a dank, soggy odor. Doggie had reduced to two head-sails and mainsail, but, in the high, short seas, the *Hermione* bucked and plunged dizzily. Four of the crew were frankly and hopelessly seasick, and rolled miserably into their bunks. Some of the rest looked worried and uncomfortable, but Doggie felt no great concern.

A storm was coming, but he had already won his title as a sailor and would maintain it, come what might. He rallied his men, while mentally planning what to do in any emergency.

Late in the afternoon they made out a small patch of white off to the north. It kept bobbing in and out of sight in a bewildering fashion, so that they only caught flashing glimpses of it, and thought, at first, that it was some vessel in the far distance. But, after tantalizing, eye-straining scrutiny of the elusive thing through the glass, they saw that it was a small boat with a mere rag of sail—so small, in fact, that when it fell into the trough of the sea it was entirely lost to view.

The sight thrilled Doggie Tolliver. Obviously the little cockle-shell contained shipwrecked men, or had been blown off shore from some point hundreds of miles away. Its occupants were poor devils of castaways, who must be rescued, or the storm would soon send them to the bottom.

Now the small boat was much closer at hand than they had thought at first and, if Doggie had held the *Hermione* up in the wind, would soon have been close aboard; but, if he thought of this at all, he dismissed it as too slow a maneuver.

Instead, he eased off the sheets and headed up toward the boat, taking the wheel himself.

The wind was coming in awkward puffs, no two, seemingly, from the same point, and the schooner yawed a good deal, in spite of his efforts to steady her. The seas lumped up under her stern and slewed it around at unexpected moments, and he found it hard to keep the wheel from jumping out of his hands.

It was exhilarating sailing, to say the least, and took his attention from the small boat. When next he caught a glimpse of it, he saw that they were on the wrong tack to fetch anywhere near it. To bring the schooner into the wind twice, once to change the tack and then to luff again to pick up the boat, seemed an unnecessary waste of time and effort, so he decided on simpler tactics. He decided to jibe. He had never jibed a boat in his life, but knew exactly how it was done. All you had to do was ease her a bit, haul your sheet till the boom came aft, then let her slide over on the other tack.

He yelled to his crew to stand by. The wind seemed to have strengthened vindictively. The dirty smudge was all about them, and there came a sudden, wild dash of rain.

Doggie spun the wheel till the boom came over the quarter. Then, just as the leech of the sail began to shake at the peak, there was a peal of thunder, a blinding burst of rain, and a great sea lifted the stern high in the air. The peak flapped with a cracking sound—and at that instant, for the first time, Doggie lost his nerve.

"Let go!" he shouted. "Pay off that sheet!" and spun the wheel the wrong way.

THERE was a smacking crash aloft, as the sheet tore from their hands, and the sail, slatting fearfully, "scandalized" against the mast, and a great sea poured over the stern. The halyard tore from the end of the gaff and the peak of the sail collapsed like the wing of a sick bird.

Somehow Doggie managed to cling to the wheel and, by some sort of instinct, bring the yacht into the wind, but when he got his legs fairly they were shaking under him so that he could barely stand.

The three men aft had all been thrown off their feet. Bob Elliford lay sprawling, ten feet from where he had stood. His brother, "Stuff," was huddled up, unconscious, blood gushing from a gash in his

Digitized by Google

head. Charlie Harding, clinging to the companion-slide with a death-grip, turned to Doggie with a face as white as chalk.

"My ——, Doggie!" he cried, "what shall we do?"

"We're all right now for a while," said Doggie, in a voice which he tried desperately to control. "Get 'Stuff' there below, at once, and see to him. Bob!" he called, as Elliford, in a daze, got to his feet, "get that sea-anchor out of the lazarette! Get it —— quick!"

The men forward had come aft in a panic. The wind was blowing strong now, and the seas had grown to great, towering things that carried the *Hermione* up and up, sickeningly, to their crests, and sent her corkscrewing, still more sickeningly, down the other side. The crippled sail was slatting madly. Doggie kept her head to the wind and drove three men forward to set the sea-anchor. The appliance was a pet of his, and he had personally supervised its manufacture. It was a conical bag, with collapsing rings, of the most approved design in the manuals, of whose use he was fully aware. Any vessel with a drogue, or sea-anchor, set, could ride out the worst storm in comparative comfort. The principle is simplicity itself, and is described in all the manuals. The drogue holds the vessel head-to-wind, in the line of least resistance, and she can not capsize without turning a back somersault, which, as Euclid says, is absurd.

When the drogue was set, the mainsail was lowered. Doggie had to bully and swear at his crew to get them into action, for they were awed and benumbed. The *Hermione*, with her crippled wing, was an apparent wreck, and the blinding rain and singing of the wind in the cordage were terrifying. One of the seasick men below was sobbing and calling aloud for help. It was Tom Olson, the violinist. "Stuff" Elliford had been carried below, still unconscious, and his brother and Harding were caring for him.

III

DOGGIE came aft, and was startled to hear a hail from the sea, right over the quarter. Looking over the side, he saw the small boat, whose existence he had entirely forgotten. A man was standing up in it. He had a pipe in his mouth, and one hand held a trailing rope, while with the other he fended the boat from the schooner's side with an oar. Although he was standing up, the fearful tossing of the little boat did not seem to disturb his equilibrium in the least. Doggie could see another man lying prone in the bottom of the boat.

The loose end of the rope, which was their own peak-halyard, was noosed under his arms. In some way they could never recall, with help and a few directions from the other man, they managed to haul him from the boat, not without much bumping of the limp body against the rail. The other man leaped aboard and, as the little boat shot from under his feet and drifted off, he seemed to mutter something profane, as he grabbed his unconscious shipmate and hauled him over the rail.

The injured man had an arm bandaged and in a sling, and there was a long, bluish-purple welt across his cheek. He was breathing stertorously, his broad chest heaving.

The man with the pipe in his teeth, after one quick, shrewd glance about, touched his forehead. He was a stolid, hatchet-faced man, burned to the hue of sole leather, and apparently of the forecastle. He held his pipe grimly in long, yellow teeth set wide apart, and pointed to the unconscious man.

"Captain, sir," he said in a voice clear above the wind, "take him aft, sir?"

Doggie nodded, and the seaman picked the other up in his arms as though he weighed no more than a child and disappeared with him into the cabin. It was almost dark. Most of Doggie's crew were below in the cabin, where the Chinese cook, a slave to duty at all times, had lit the lamp. The rescued man laid his companion on a transom and forced whisky between his lips, emotionless unconcern in his face. Elliford and Harding were binding up poor "Stuff's" head with a towel. Two others gulped down whisky from the bottle on the table. Presently the shipwrecked seaman filled and lit his pipe, came on deck, touched his forehead to Doggie and without a word went forward and stood in the waist, leaning against the rail and puffing at his pipe, which he shielded from the rain with his hand.

Doggie leaned against the house and thought. He was in deep trouble. The

Digitized by Google

truth must be told. He did not know exactly what to do.

He had made a frightful blunder, which his crew realized, looking at him with chattering teeth. They were all taking hurried drinks in the cabin now. He had lost their confidence and, moreover, had lost some of his own.

According to his theory, the *Hermione* should be in but slight danger now. He had understood that a vessel "rode out a storm, to a drogue, or sea-anchor, with ease," but the yacht was rolling and pitching in a way that bade fair to shake the sticks out of her, and the seas were breaking heavily over the bow. It was all wrong. He wondered if it would ease her to get out the oil-bags.

The yacht was crippled, too. That peak-halyard must be rove through the block at the masthead and made fast to the gaff, before the sail could be hoisted.

He looked aloft at the topmast, sweeping long arcs against the sky. The rain, which was intermittent, had abated for the moment.

Doggie had never been aloft on the *Hermione* except when she was at rest in the harbor, but he had done it often enough to be expert at the performance, and, with some idea of reëstablishing his confidence in himself, he found the loose end of the halyard. It took some time, for it was hard to keep his feet, and when, holding the end, he won his way to the rail, it was with infinite peril that he succeeded in swinging himself into the shrouds.

The man with the pipe stood on the opposite side of the deck, silently puffing.

Doggie had mounted but a short distance when he found that the tossing schooner, the blinding rain in his face and the wind all seemed to be conspiring to fling him off into the seething water below and behind him. He set his teeth as he ascended, foot by foot, clutching at each new hold with a death-grip. He was half-way to the top when the schooner rolled, violently at first, then slowly over—over, till it seemed she must roll down to her beam-ends, and Doggie was far out over the black, boiling water, staring with eyes of horror.

Suddenly the yacht swung over the other way in a long, nauseating sweep. There came a fresh burst of rain, a terrific crash of thunder and a blinding flash. Clinging in abject terror, Doggie dropped the halyard, and hung on, his whole body shivering. Then, blindly, with the haste of utter fear, he made his way to the deck.

He threw himself face down on the low cabin-house, his nerve utterly gone and, with his head in his arms, sobbed aloud. What a cowardly, self-sufficient ass he was! He had failed—absolutely; and all these fellows—good fellows, who had trusted in his self-conceit—were to be sacrificed.

Who was to lead them now? He had tried, but now——Doggie cursed himself in abject bitterness. Between curses, he prayed to his Maker for help.

SOME ONE was shouting: "Doggie! Oh, Doggie, where are you?" in an agonized voice, but he paid no heed. He was still sobbing hysterically when he felt himself shaken roughly by the shoulder. He started violently, and turned to confront a man with his arm in a sling and his blue, seaman's eyes blazing—the man who had been carried aft unconscious. He was in a state of tremendous excitement.

"Say!" he cried, "are you the Captain of this lunatic asylum? Are you? If you are, what in —— are you up to? Tell me that! Speak up, man, quick!"

Doggie looked at him dully.

"Up to?" said he.

"Yes, 'up to!' What in the name of —— are you lying here for?"

Doggie's natural combativeness asserted itself. "Halyard gave way. We're riding it out. What's it to you?"

"Riding it out! Riding *what* out? How are you riding?" His eyes roved overhead and forward, taking in the *Hermione's* bare poles.

"Riding out the storm; with a sea-anchor!"

The seaman's eyes fairly started from his head, and his face became so darkly suffused that Doggie thought he was about to rupture a blood-vessel.

"Sea-anchor! Storm! Why you—you—you—— Why, this ain't no storm! This ain't no more 'n a Kona—a big thunder-shower! But say!" he grasped Doggie by the shoulder again, in a grip of iron, shook him violently and, placing his mouth close to Doggie's ear, shouted: "Listen, you fool! Do you hear that?"

He pointed off to leeward, and in the midst of all other sounds Doggie could hear, far in the distance, it seemed, a strange,

Digitized by Google

ominous booming. He had been hearing it, in a sort of subconscious way, for some time.

"Man!" said the other, "that's the French Frigate Shoals! Do you know that? You're drifting smack down on 'em. In half an hour there won't be nothing left of you but some splinters and shark-bait! Get sail on her—*sail*, do you hear? Get in your fool sea-anchor! Mebbe it's too late; we're close aboard, but *make sail!*"

Doggie jumped to his feet, aghast. The French Frigate Shoals! Good heavens, what had he been dreaming of? And yet—he had noted them on the chart, far out of their course. How the *Hermione* must have drifted! A great fear clutched at his heart, for he had read of those dread shoals in the Directory of the Pacific, and he did the only obvious thing.

"Captain, take charge, won't you? Tell us what to do. The main peak-halyard's busted——"

But the other Captain was already yelling "Mike!" at the top of his lungs.

The tall, leathery sailor appeared, still sucking at his pipe.

"Mike, you —— swab, what are you standin' around doin' nothin' for? That's the French Frigates over there and this kindergarten crew——"

"Hadn't no orders, sir," said Mike, respectfully.

"Well, take 'em!" He turned to Tolliver. "Call your men! Mike, go forward and get sail on her—staysail and jib! Double-reef fore- and mains'l; then take in that fool sea-anchor! Lively now!"

"All hands!" called Doggie, in his best nautical voice.

Most of the men were already on deck. Harding appeared from the cabin, much the worse for the whisky he had drunk. Mike suddenly pocketed his pipe. "Forrard there, all!" said the strange Captain, and, "Forrard there, all!" echoed Mike.

Harding was an amateur boxer of renown. He blinked his eyes at the strangers.

"Here, who the deuce are you? What's all this?" said he, truculently.

Mike stepped quickly forward and kicked him in the stomach. Boxing was not in his line.

"Take orders!" yelled Doggie. "Go forward! Make sail!" and they rushed forward in a body, understanding, somehow, that there was a change in the situation.

"Stuff" Elliford, his chubby face half enveloped in a bloody bandage, staggered out of the cabin, looking white and wretched.

"Sinking, Doggie?" he asked, hopelessly.

"Shouldn't wonder! Bear a hand, Stuff. Get forward and bear a hand!"

The strange Captain had found the end of the halyard and, with it in his teeth, and with but one of his hands to help, was running up the ratlines like a great ape. At the top he hooked his leg round a shroud, rove the rope through the block and was on deck again with the rope's end in an incredibly short time.

He handed the rope to Doggie.

"Here," he called, "belay that! My hand's no good."

The head-sails were set and flapping and Mike, followed by the dazed crew, came tumbling aft. The fore-and mainsail were double-reefed and raised.

Doggie could now hear the loud, terrifying snarl of the breakers close behind. Under the great press of sail the schooner heeled far over and paid off on the port tack, with Mike at the wheel. But breakers could now be heard off to starboard, apparently hemming them in in a semi-circle.

The new Captain yelled his orders and Mike put the wheel over, but the *Hermione*, instead of going about, hung up in the wind for a moment, then lay over and paid off on the same tack.

Three times was this repeated. The wind flung her down till the lee rail was buried in boiling, rushing water, and it seemed as though she would be blown flat.

Doggie hung on to the wheel with Mike, as he toiled and sweat and swore under his panting breath. But the yacht would not go about, and each second drove her closer to the breakers.

The strange Captain yelled in Doggie's ear, "We've got to clubhaul her!"

DOGGIE nodded, though he looked blankly over his shoulder. He had never heard of clubhauling. The books hadn't mentioned it. It is a stratagem rarely employed. Not one able seaman in a hundred has ever seen it done.

"Only twelve fathoms here," the stranger shouted; "good holding! Clubhaul, Mike! Lee anchor! Drive them sheep forrard. Lively, now!"

Mike ran forward, driving Doggie's stupefied crew with curses and brandished fists,

Digitized by Google

while the Captain grasped a spoke of the wheel with his uninjured hand.

At a yell from Mike, he relaxed the wheel, then, "Let go!" he cried.

The anchor splashed over and, as the yacht brought up, the men came running aft with the hawser, which they made fast with awkward haste. They were working for their lives, and knew it, but the steady cocksureness of the two seamen rallied them, as Doggie's self-confidence had done heretofore.

Mike had lashed the hawser, temporarily, at the bow. At the signal, he cut the lashing with a hatchet and came running aft. Two men were sent to the jib sheets.

"Now," yelled the captain suddenly, "tail on to that hawser!"

Doggie was beginning to understand the value of the maneuver as a final resort. If it failed, they would last but a few minutes.

There was neither capstan nor windlass aft on the *Hermione,* and they must haul the stern over, if possible, by hand. The wheel was thrown over and held, hard down.

"Haul away! Sway on it! *Sway* on it!" yelled the Captain. "*Haul*, you ——, kindergarten lubbers! Ah!"

The heeling vessel slowly righted, as she came into the wind. The luffs shook and, for what seemed to Doggie Tolliver, as he hauled for dear life at the hawser, a thousand years, she hung, all shaking, in irons. Then slowly, oh, so slowly, she lay over on the other tack.

"Cut!" yelled the Captain, and Mike hacked desperately at the hawser, as it lay over the rail. It snapped suddenly, and the lubbers fell sprawling, but the schooner was free!

The danger was past! Lying down, with canting deck, she was flying away from the breakers, and Doggie's heart began to beat as if it had been suspended for hours. He had caught, over his shoulder, a glimpse of a great burst of white water, roaring toward the sky.

"Now, Mike," said the Captain, some minutes later, "take in that fores'l!"

"Aye, aye! Fores'l, sir. Fores'l-halyards, you men! Lower away!"

The long seaman's face wore a look of pure, holy joy, for he had probably never issued a command before in his life.

The Captain relinquished the wheel to Doggie.

"Keep her as she is," said he.

Half an hour later, the *Hermione* was plunging along, miles to the south. The sea was still rough, but the wind had fallen and, through the low-flying, ragged mass of cloud overhead, they caught, now and then, the momentary glimpse of a star.

IV

A-FONG, the Chinese cook, laid bottles on the cabin-table and the strange Captain filled his glass, and then his pipe, by sticking it in his pocket and poking loose tobacco into the bowl with his finger. His strong, brown face was quite calm.

In repose his expression was pleasing, and there was a twinkle in his clear blue eye. Doggie sat with his elbow on the table and his chin in his hand, a prey to unhappy thoughts. He scrupulously avoided the eyes of his crew.

In his own mind he was a "chump" and a "four-flusher" who had come within two shakes of sacrificing the lives of all his companions, and he shuddered inwardly, while trying to maintain an easy air. But the strain had so shaken him that he could, again, have sobbed like a boy.

"Captain," said the stranger, "here's to your little ship! She sails like a witch. It was touch and go with us for a minute there, I tell you!"

He held up his glass and drank solemnly, the twinkle still lurking in his eye.

"Pretty fine little ship, and by Christmas, you might have lost her! Now, I suppose you are wondering who in Sam Hill I am. I'm Captain Alf Buckland, of the trading schooner *Hinano.* We were run down by a son of a gun of a lime-juice tramp night before last and Mike and I were the only ones left. We'd have gone, too, if one of the boats hadn't floated clear, for the Billy-be-damned steamer went on as if nothing had happened. We were getting almighty hungry when we saw you bearing down, and Mike and I were just beginning to talk of hot coffee and good things to eat when you scandalized that sail—" Captain Buckland chuckled deep in his throat and took another drink.

Doggie winced, and reddened to the ears.

"Then, as we crossed your bows—we'd taken in the sail and were rowing—we ran a-foul of something——" The Captain

Digitized by Google

chuckled again, and choked a little over his tobacco. "It was the line to your sea-anchor, and being kind of unexpected, it slewed us around and drove us down against the bow of the schooner so sudden that my oar jammed—I was only using one hand; the other got smashed in the wreck—and hit me a hard clip on the jaw, that knocked me out cold."

The Captain smoked in silence for a while, his eyes roving somewhat quizzically from face to face, then, taking in the luxurious fittings of the cabin: "Pretty nice little ship you have, Captain, as I said before. Been sailing her long?

Harding, Elliford and all the crew save three, who were on deck with Mike, looked on silently, with various emotions depicted on their faces.

It was too much for Doggie. "Not long enough, I'm afraid, Captain. Still, I have a master's certificate——"

"You—you have which?"

Doggie rose to his feet, his jaw set. He took the cherished certificate and threw it on the table.

"Yes, by thunder! a master's certificate! There it is! I thought I'd earned it. I was mistaken, that's all. Here goes!"

He tore the certificate to bits and tossed them on the floor.

"Now listen, Captain, and you fellows, too! I've had my lesson. I thought I knew it all, and was dashed smart because I held that precious ticket. You've seen the answer. I lost caste, I expect, but—well, so much for that! I'm still game, if you chaps are, and we'll go on with this cruise as we planned. Captain Buckland, you're free, I take it, and I'll make you a proposal. I'm owner of this yacht. Sign on with me as captain and I'll pay you anything you like—hang the money, we owe you our lives. Mike, who knows more sailing than the rest of us put together, can be second mate, if he's willing, and I'll sail under you as chief mate and try, by gracious, with your help, really to *earn* a certificate. How does that strike you?"

The Captain's eyes twinkled more than ever, and he now smiled at Doggie with honest approval.

"You're a good sort, lad," said he. "You have the right stuff in you. Hanged if I don't take you up!" and he held out his hand.

Doggie clutched it eagerly.

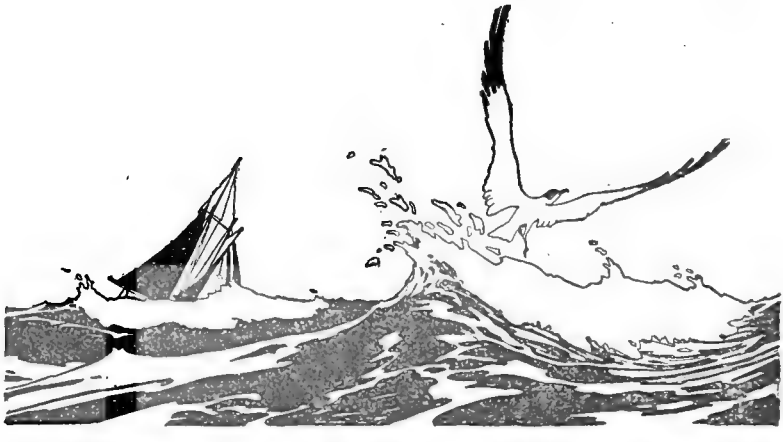
"Thanks for that, Captain!"

He looked at the others over his shoulder.

"Suit you fellows?"

"Sure!" said Harding, ex-chief-officer, and, "Sure!" echoed the others.

"Then, boys, fill up, and drink to our new sailing-master, who sails with his brains, and not according to the books—Captain Buckland, of the *Hermione*."



Digitized by Google

THE LAW OF CLUB AND FANG

By Barton Wood Currie

CHAPTER I

MONDAY'S MURDER MYSTERY

THE *Tonopah Sun* had blazoned in big type the fact that on the evening of Saturday, October second, Dr. Horatio Stubbs, the eminent young camp-physician, would discuss certain scientific aspects of Monday's murder mystery at the Eldorado Club, in an effort to arouse public indignation over a baffling crime.

The head-lines were black and bold, and the article beneath the stirring sub-heads would have served to enliven the most jaded appetite for thrills, in any other community than a brand-new boom mining-camp. From a newspaper standpoint, the three prime elements of a big story were present—murder, mystery and the gentler sex. The writer of the double-leaded appeal to the denizens of the camp to probe the mystery and avenge the crime employed every trick and device of his craft to stimulate interest in Dr. Stubbs's lecture, but he did not more than half succeed.

While he succeeded in drawing a crowd to the recently opened club-house, with its upholstered chairs, its polished tables, its six stock-tickers and its glittering bar, he failed to instil into that throng of gold-hunters and mine-manipulators anything resembling a passionate absorption in Dr. Stubbs's lecture and the mystery of the death of the unknown woman whose body had been found back of Jack's dance-hall five evenings before.

Gold and the lure thereof were constant enough sources of thrills without the intrusion of any such purely abstract subject as a murder mystery. It was, therefore, more out of good-natured tolerance that the assemblage of men who packed the room listened to the young physician.

WITH due regard to the value of sensationalism, Dr. Stubbs had brought with him from his office the skull of a defunct Seattle longshoreman with

Digitized by Google

which to illustrate his discourse. He had led off with the announcement that the wound which had caused death was the most baffling lethal injury he had ever sought to diagnose, and he had interspersed his description with many ominous-sounding medical phrases, hoping in this way to hammer home the scientific value of his findings.

He had scarcely begun to warm up to his subject when Sandstorm Smith humbly begged his pardon for the interruption and said,

"Dr. Stubbs, would you mind telling us in hard-boiled English whether the wound was caused by a direct blow from an instrument held in a human hand, or whether it came from the contact of a missile?"

"I have endeavored to explain," bristled the young medical man, "that there is no possible means at this time of reaching a conclusion as to whether the blow was direct from a weapon held stiffly in a human hand or from some sort of missile. The mark on the flesh was barely perceptible—two small circles, one within the other, and then a puncture in the immediate center of the inner circle.

"The puncture extended through the skull and brain tissues for a distance, I should say, of about half an inch. The point of contact on the left temple, *to speak in hard-boiled English,* was the most vulnerable point that could have been chosen. An interesting phase which I was unable to establish, through lack of proper laboratory facilities, was that the instrument which caused the puncture injected a powerful alkaloid poison into the brain. As——"

"Bosh!" broke in a smothered exclamation from somewhere in the crowd, causing the young physician to blush and stammer. There was a craning of necks and an eager glancing about, but, as the person who had uttered the derisive monosyllable did not reveal himself by further remarks, Dr. Stubbs resumed:

"As I intended to explain, this poison phase suggested itself to me because of the condition of the brain, but lack of laboratory facilities prevented me from obtaining any conclusive evidence of poison. However, I am certain that the blow itself, followed by the puncture of the brain, would have been sufficient to cause death, and that almost instantly. There was concussion and hemorrhage sufficient by itself to cause the death of one so frail and delicately constituted.

"As to the manner of weapon used, or the sort of missile thrown, I confess I am completely in the dark. I am unable to find fault with the Coroner's verdict, 'death from unknown causes.' But I *do* complain of his palpable indifference, and of the fact that my report to District Attorney Bolton of Esmeralda County has brought no reply from his office in Hawthorne. I know the county has little money to spend on an elaborate investigation, but I feel that the mystery of the dead woman's identity, her delicate beauty and the quality and character of her clothing, should arouse every man."

"You are sure then that a murder was committed?" asked Sam Smilax, who had happened into Tonopah that day to meet his mining partner, Remsen Halliday Leaf, who was due back from an important prospecting trip in the Round Mountain district.

"I am morally certain of it," responded Dr. Stubbs petulantly, "though, as a professional man, I do not feel called upon to close every avenue of doubt. There is the merest chance that death might have been due to some strange and unaccountable accident. If so, it was an accident of the most extraordinary sort. I went over every inch of the bare ground where the body was found, and there was no stone or any other substance which could have caused such a wound. Furthermore, there was scarcely any dust upon the clothing. This fact alone persuades me that the victim of the tragedy was carried out to that mound back of Jack's dance-hall and placed there. It is unfortunate that this flinty desert soil will scarcely take a footprint. If——"

"OH, CORK up your theories for to-night, Doc, and let's have a drink," growled a big raw-boned man with a short black beard and thick, overhanging black brows. "We've had enough of this rot for to-night. Your woman of mystery probably had a past, and fell down-stairs in the dark. Sato, ask everybody what they'll have, and bring Doc Stubbs a long glass, for he needs a triple bracer."

Sam Smilax flung round on the butter-in

Digitized by Google

and said quietly, but with a nasty bite of sarcasm in his voice,

"If you don't object, I would like to ask the Doctor another question."

"But I do object," retorted the big man, gruffly. "This is a club, not an inquest-parlor. And you, Mr. Whoever-You-Are, are not even a member of it, seeing as I noticed you sign the guests' register."

"As my guest," broke in Sandstorm Smith, with his characteristic drawl. "And, as my guest, he acquires all the privileges of the club, one of which is not to drink with you, Jim Falkner; also to ask as many questions as he —— pleases of Dr. Stubbs. That goes without a copper, unless you desire to walk out on the trail and take issue."

Jim Falkner shrugged his shoulders, forced a laugh and elbowed his way up the room toward the little club bar, followed by half a dozen of his friends, who scowled at Smith and Smilax as they passed, but refrained from remarks.

Dr. Stubbs, a man of peace, flew signals of panic at the tone of Sandstorm Smith's voice, and hastily began wrapping up the skull with which he had illustrated his lecture.

The movement toward the bar and tables became general then, and the assembled leading citizens of Tonopah seemed to cast off the murder and its fabric of mystery as if it were a topic that merely afforded amusement for the moment.

CHAPTER II

BLACK ALLEN STARTS SOMETHING

"I'M SORRY I caused this unpleasantness, Sandy," said Sam Smilax, as he and his big blond friend got out on the street and stood under one of the camp's brand new arc-lights. "It looked to me, though, as if he took a nasty method of interrupting. He knew I just blew in here this afternoon, and that I was only beginning to get a line on that woman's murder. I sure don't like the way Falkner talked about her, whoever or whatever she was. He may be one of your big stock-jobbing capitalists, but he sizes up to me as pretty coarse goods."

"He is the same, Sammy," responded Sandstorm Smith, "and he knows just how I feel about it. He's got a big following, because he's able to raise big money for development-work. Some of his promotions smell high of wildcat, and I've heard that he was mixed up with that old Blue Square Syndicate bunch, who'd steal the pennies out of a blind man's cup. But here's Black Allen of the *Tonopah Sun*, Sam, and if you're curious to learn more about the murder mystery, as Dr. Stubbs calls it, he's the gentleman who can hand it to you, to the last element of agony."

The young man whom Sandstorm Smith had hailed and beckoned to had failed to attend the lecture he had arranged and boosted, because he was busily engaged in putting his little four-page daily to press, with an advance version of Doc Stubbs's expoundings spread all over the front page. He had just come up on Main Street for a breathing spell after running off his few hundred circulation, and was strolling along the board sidewalk smoking a big, black cigar. His straw hat was tilted back from his forehead and his hands were shoved deep into the pockets of his loose Norfolk jacket, and he walked with an easy graceful swing that betokened perfect elasticity of muscle and tendon.

Robert Kennedy Allen, or Black Allen as he was widely known in newspaper-circles from the Golden Gate to El Paso, from El Paso to Denver and from Denver to Seattle, was a mighty well-put-up young man, in the latter twenties. He got the nickname of "Black" from the jet hue of his mass of curly hair, his big flashing dark eyes and his swarthy yet ruddy complexion.

He was of medium height, deep-chested, slim-waisted and wide-shouldered, and was known to have licked three times his weight in longshoremen while covering the Barbary Coast for the San Francisco *Courier* at a time when ship-news was the Golden Gate's most strenuous assignment.

Nevertheless, he was not the swaggering, aggressive kind of young Westerner who is constantly on the hunt for trouble, and his frank smile and hearty manner were apt to deceive the casual observer into the belief that he was just a big kid, who had come down into the high altitudes of Nevada for excitement and romp, and that he would be one of the last persons on earth to follow a serious purpose with a dogged tenacity which nothing could shake.

Black Allen had purchased the *Tonopah Sun* at a bargain, from a gentleman whose

Digitized by Google

extremities had suffered a sudden invasion of zero when threatened with a Winchester libel-suit. Allen had taken over the libel-suit with whatever else there was in the way of assets, and said libel-suit was still pending but becoming more and more remote as the new editor went about seeking the plaintiff and inviting him to start something.

All of which is a sufficient "Who's Who" for the Nevada journalist whom Sandstorm Smith hailed and requested to meet his friend Samuel Smilax, Esquire, of Stillwater, Reno and the Washoe Range.

The two young men shook hands warmly and knew they were going to like each other, first grip.

"YOU'VE heard me speak of Sammy Smilax, Bob," said Sandstorm, "and it may interest you to know that he is the partner of that little chap with the big goggles who sent you the box of Lilliputian smoke-wagons to help you out in that libel-suit you mentioned in some of your editorials. Guess you've kept tabs on some of the partnership's lifts up the ladder of success, as that's your particular line?"

"Reckon so," laughed Black Allen. "Why, it was only last night that we were talking about the 'Terror of the Cœur d'Alene,' and how he failed to connect with the Yellow Horse Mine. I wish you'd let me print that story, Sam—or do you prefer 'Sammy?' I never use 'mister' when I think I'm going to make a friend."

"I'd rather you'd not publish it, Bob," replied Sam quickly. "It didn't amount to a hill of beans, and I don't like to get in the newspapers. But I do wish you would tell me all you know about the death of that woman. For some reason I can't explain, I've taken a big interest in the case."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," said Allen, with a swift change of tone, his smile vanishing and his face showing in every line an almost fierce seriousness. "If you have nothing on, come down to my office and I'll give you an outline of the whole thing, with a few of my theories thrown in. I've been all over it with Sandy here, but some way I can't seem to wake him up to it."

"Oh, it isn't that," retorted Sandstorm Smith. "You can interest me all right, if you'll put your finger on something tangible. Doc Stubbs has been rubbing me the wrong way by hurling saw-bone Latin at me every meal for the past few days. He picked me out as a choice victim because nobody else would give him an ear. I helped you arrange the lecture at the club to-night, hoping he would get it all out of his system at one full swoop. I'm not exactly blasé on the subject, merely a trifle bored. You know I hate to wear my face lengthwise when I can grin broad. So long, pals. I trust you two can get together and dig up something more substantial than theories." The big jovial Sandys Storm Smith flung round on his heel and strode off in the alluring direction of the Seven Wheels.

CHAPTER III

CONCERNING CHAW, BUGS AND JIMMY SILK

BLACK ALLEN'S sanctum and printing establishment occupied a one-storied shack of makeshift construction on one of the narrow side streets which rambled off the main thoroughfare of Tonopah. The appointments were of the crudest sort, for at that period in the history of the southern Nevada desert, furniture was practically worth its weight in gold. The so-called sanctum was defined only by a square, drawn about a desk and two chairs, with red chalk.

Jimmy Silk, the devil of the shop, had drawn the square on the floor at his boss's orders, and it was a source of huge delight to the ink-bespattered imp to stop outside the chalk-line and ask if he might come in. When Editor Allen assented, the youngster would go through an elaborate pantomime of opening and closing the "door."

Bugs Blossom, who combined in himself Allen's composing-room force, was superstitious, and never could be persuaded to cross the chalk-line, not even though a bottle of ninety-proof Bourbon stood on the editor's desk. He would have gone into a grizzly's cave for boot-leg rye, but nothing would induce him to step within a chalked square.

Bugs Blossom and Jimmy Silk were of prodigious assistance to Black Allen in overcoming the tedium of getting out a boom-camp paper, and, take it from one who knows, there are times when this same tedium has innocuous desuetude backed

Digitized by Google

off the boards—sometimes, though not during the epoch with which this chronicle deals.

If only primitively furnished, the *Tonopah Sun* office was equipped with electric lights and guarded by a big shaggy yellow dog, whose specialty it was to announce visitors or prowlers, and who had survived the distribution of a pound or so of lead in various portions of his dog anatomy. Black Allen had picked him up on the San Francisco waterfront and called him "Chaw."

"I consider Chaw a canine of rare sagacity," said Black Allen to Sam Smilax, as he motioned his guest to a chair and drew out a little sheaf of yellow paper from one of the drawers of the hacked and battered desk.

He had bolted the door behind him and pulled down the blinds on the two windows which looked out on the narrow alleyway. The dog had been at his heels every moment of the time, wagging a weird stump of a tail and uttering inarticulate noises to manifest his adoration. The uncomely mutt had vouchsafed Sam a curt glance of approval and then utterly ignored his presence.

"Yes," Allen pursued, seating himself and flattening out the little bundle of notes. "I'd bank on Chaw's judgment against the combined wisdom of all the bipeds in this camp. By that I don't exempt present company, for Chaw reads character with the gifted eye of a seer. He can tell me what kind of a visitor I'm going to have before that specific visitor is half-way down the alley, the same being a mighty big help when you're running a column of gossip about men with pasts. It enables me to have my smile or my guns ready in advance.

"I tell you all this because Chaw plays no small part in this woman case. He was the first to discover the body, and his actions at that time and immediately thereafter instilled me with the belief at the very start that a crime had been committed.

"This is Saturday. The body was found Monday night, a few minutes after eleven o'clock. I had left the office at ten to go to Doc Stubbs's shack and play a game of chess with him. Chaw remained on guard, as usual. He was not a prisoner, as there is a loose board in the back of the shop that allows him to go and come at will. Whenever I am needed here and Bugs or Jimmy Silk, my printer and devil respectively, don't know where to find me, they just say to Chaw, 'Go get your master.' He'd find me if he had to go down a mine or trail a burro across the desert.

"WELL, on Monday night he came to Doc Stubbs's shack and he scratched the door as if he wanted to tear a hole through the panel. He didn't bark or make any other sound. When I opened the door, he seized the leg of my trousers in his teeth and tugged with all his strength to pull me out. There was something in the way he did this that awakened my instincts.

"'There's something up,' I said to Doc Stubbs. 'You better come along with me.' The Doc is considerably gun-shy and a high advocate of peace, but he kicked over the chess-board and came right along like a little man.

"Now the Doc's shack is on the other side of Main Street, about five hundred yards south of what would be the rear yard to Jack's dance-hall, if it had any circumscribed area answering to the description of a back yard. As soon as the Doc and I were out of the shack, Chaw made a bee-line across the virgin sage-brush and alkali soil for the vacant area behind the dance-hall.

"It was the blackest kind of a night, with the stars high hung and dim-flickering, and Chaw led us a rough journey over scraggy hummocks and through wire-laced sage, avoiding, it seemed on purpose, everything in the nature of a straight line. He seemed bent on going around all the remote huts on the outskirts, as if he hated their lights.

"When he had finally finished his circling and headed in toward the blaze of light from the dance-hall windows, he let down his pace to a walk and stopped every fifty feet or so to sniff the air and growl. He finally stopped about two hundred feet to the rear of the dance-hall, well without the glare of its lights. He laid down flat then, rested his head on his paws and commenced to snarl in a peculiar manner that made my flesh creep.

"A few feet in front of the animal, there rose a misshapen joshua-tree about five feet tall. This tree seemed to writhe up out of the ground, and then, when our eye

Digitized by Google

got used to the darkness, something terribly white appeared at its base.

"It was the face of a dead woman.

"Doc Stubbs was down on his knees beside the body in a flash, calling on me to strike a light. He had been tottering along behind me in a state of more or less funk, but whatever vague fear possessed him vanished the instant his professional instincts were aroused. I had only to hold two or three lighted matches before he got up and said, 'There's nothing we can do for her. She's dead and has been so about three hours. She doesn't belong to the camp and isn't the sort you'd expect to find out here back of Jack's dance-hall.'

"There wasn't any doubt about that. Half a glance at the delicate features of her face convinced me that here was a woman any decent man might have been glad to acknowledge as his mother or sister. While Doc Stubbs is sure that she was a woman of about forty, she looked ten or fifteen years younger in the calm of death.

"We left Chaw out there by the joshua-tree to guard the body, while we scoured the camp in search of Sheriff Steve Dawson and Coroner Multhorpe. We found them in a poker-game, back of Barney Rider's undertaking-shop. They were both winning and I had to hand out a pretty nasty line of talk to get them out of the game. Some of my remarks roweled pretty deep, and they've been so sore ever since that they've laid down cold on the case and have balked all my efforts to stir up interest and have the crime investigated. They're a pair of fat-heads, anyhow, and couldn't make an intelligent deduction from a fact if it hit them in the eye.

"We had the body taken to the undertaking-shop, though, and Doc Stubbs made a careful examination and performed an autopsy. You've heard him expound his theory that the victim of this murder was struck a blow on the temple that left a peculiar mark he calls a pointed circle. He also mentioned poison, but I can't see where that fits in. The inquest held by that swine Multhorpe was an owlish affair, too, in which everybody blinked their eyes and looked wise and then rendered the verdict, 'death from unknown causes.'

"All the testimony there was to be had, was offered at the inquest, and it adds up zero. Every man and woman in Tonopah had seen the body and none could or would offer the faintest hint of identification. There was absolutely no mark or tag on the clothing that would give any clue. The clothing was good, but evidently home-made—that is, except for the shoes and stockings and corsets. The dress was of dark gray material, the jacket lined with gray satin. It was well made and fitted her slender figure perfectly. There was no hat found near the body. She had a lot of chestnut hair, which was coiled loosely about her head and not secured by a single hairpin. This would lead one to the conclusion that she lived here and had gone out for an evening stroll.

"But she did not live here. I have made a house-to-house, man-to-man and woman-to-woman canvass, which proves to my satisfaction that she arrived in Tonopah on the train which got in here from Reno at seven o'clock in the evening, only an hour or so before she was killed, according to the time fixed by Doc Stubbs.

"Singular as that is, it is still more mysterious that she should have come into a camp of this sort and failed to attract attention. As far as I can learn, there were only two other women passengers on the train who got off here.

"THE other two came up from 'Frisco in a stateroom as companions of a partner of Jim Falkner, known among his pals as Willie the Lush, whose chief characteristic is that he's as cunning as a fox and sharp as a lynx, drunk or sober. Willie the Lush, who wears on his business card the name 'Sidney Horace Porter'—well, I know he has a police record in 'Frisco, due to his habit of investing money for widows and orphans in sand-banks and marsh-lands. And in other cities he may have another kind of a record. He's one of the gentlemen I want you to keep in mind, Sam Smilax, if you are going to find the time or inclination to work with me on this mystery."

"Is he a thin-faced, tow-headed man with big shoulders and a wasp waist?" cut in Sam, quickly, with a sudden blaze of interest.

"The same!" cried Black Allen. "Do you know him?"

"Yes, I know him," replied Sam, compressing his lips. "I saw him drive his fist into a young woman's face in a certain

Digitized by Google

place in Reno about three years ago. I think he's got a scar on the back of his head where my gun-sight landed. He never knew where that tap came from for a day or so after, and when he got out of the hospital he didn't come round to Speedy Thurston's to look me up. He's one man I—— But go on with your story."

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTERIOUS WOMAN

"I WAS saying that the only two women I can get any line on as passengers on that Monday-night train were the pair this man Porter brought up with him. I can't seem to find out just who these blondes are, but judging from descriptions obtained, their type is obvious and they couldn't have been connected with the dead woman. I may be wrong, but that is my belief. As for Willie the Lush, all I could get out of him was the declaration that he was boiled and had been boiled for a week. He wasn't so boiled, however, but that he was able to sit down at the faro-table in the Tonopah Club at 7:30 P.M., and win two thousand four hundred dollars in a five-hour session, a session which, I am sorry to say, gives him a perfect alibi so far as the actual commission of this murder is concerned. After putting his two blondes in a hack, he swears, he went straight to the club and began to play.

"None of the five station-hackmen noticed the woman who was murdered get off the train. The station-agent, baggageman and hotel-runners didn't see her. She failed to visit any of the hotels or restaurants. The baffling thing is—where did she go? I have only one answer to offer, and that is pure theory: She went straight to the Stock Exchange Arcade, diagonally opposite the railroad-depot, on Main Street. The Arcade's electric sign is the blaziest thing on the street next to the dance-hall sign, a block farther down, and these October evenings they light that sign up at 6 P.M. sharp. Now there are fourteen offices in the Arcade and they are occupied by—— Pst! Look at Chaw."

Black Allen shut his voice down to a whisper and both he and Sam gazed with intense eagerness at the dog, whose hair had begun to bristle straight up along his spine.

The animal made no sound, but showed all his teeth in a wrinkled wolf-grin, as he crept toward the door, with his belly close to the floor. Unconsciously, Sam Smilax's right hand slid into his jacket-pocket, and his fingers closed on the hilt of a .38. As he did so, Black Allen reached over and touched him on the arm.

"Don't move," he whispered. "Watch the left-hand window. I'm going to spring the shade and shift the light."

As he said this, he reached out across his desk and swung over a small electric-switch lever, which Sam had not noticed before. Instantly there was a singing report, as the window-shade shot up and spun round on its roller. In the same moment, the light in the sanctum went out and a big bulb blazed in the long bracket that jutted out into the alley from above the doorway of the shop.

It was all accomplished with the instantaneousness of a flash-light, and Sam Smilax and Black Allen looked out into the illuminated alleyway as if from the bellows of a camera. They saw two men recoil from the window as if hurled back by an explosion, and, as they staggered back, they whipped out their guns and waved them blindly as if warding off a fancied attack from all sides. They were still staggering backward when Black Allen manipulated another little switch, and the alleyway, as well as the shop, was plunged in darkness.

"Listen to 'em scuttle," chuckled Allen, as the noise of shuffling feet died away in a smothered echo. "I bet they fetch into Main Street by the back trails. Did you notice the gentleman you tapped on the bean with your gun-sight, Sam? No noise there, Chaw—the enemy has blown," and the resourceful young Tonopah journalist turned on the shop light again and went to the window to pull down the shade.

As Allen returned to his chair, with his dog dancing about his heels and leaping up to lick his hands, Sam Smilax asked,

"Who was the other one?"

"A misguided youth who goes by the name of Hank Benton," responded Allen. "He was once an aspiring young author and a shining light in San Francisco's Bohemia. In an evil day he met a prosperous crook who hired him to write mining-prospectuses. He possessed just the imagination required to tempt the shining

Digitized by Google

dollars out of stockings and from the secure shelter of mattress-linings. I consider him one of the greatest fictionists of the age.

"He can transform a six-foot shaft, sunk in indigo basalt, into an Aladdin's grotto dripping with twenty-carat nuggets. He was writing fairy-lore for the Blue Square Syndicate when Jim Falkner and his little company of highbinders signed him up to gild their lilies for them. He has hung out with that crowd long enough to acquire their dirty code of ethics and, while he's a pretty poor specimen of a man, he is clever enough to be a dangerous schemer."

"Got sort of a sweet-sister look about him," grunted Sam.

"Yes indeed," nodded Allen. "He's a pretty boy, right enough, and a great favorite with the frail sisterhood, but don't mislead yourself into the belief that he's any shrinking flower. He's figured in more than one coroner's case and is considerable of a bold lion when he's got some of the huskies of his gang to back him up. He's got to have the moral support of bad company, though. Take him off by himself somewhere and throw the harpoon into him and the yellow comes out all over."

"What was the play to-night?" Sam asked.

Black Allen shook his head and picked up his little bundle of notes again.

"I suspect one or the other is gunning for me," he said, absently. "I've paid Hank Benton several left-handed compliments in my rag from time to time, and I once wrote a squib to the effect that Willie the Lush polluted the air he breathed. Whether or not they are mixed up in this case under discussion, it will be our purpose to unravel.

"My idea is that they know something. They've been trying to pump Jimmy Silk, that wise little devil of mine, for the past two days, and they have offices in that same Stock Exchange Arcade I started to tell you about. I'm glad I got this little electric-switch device rigged up in time for their visit. It gave us a picture, and they drew a blank, and old Chaw got a chance to show he's still a world-beater in the Sherlock Holmes game.

"BUT to come back to the case of this crime-mystery and give you my theory pat, in a few words: I believe she came down here to inquire about a mess of phony mining-stock; that she was the victim of some peculiarly dirty swindle; that some brute of a ruffian murdered her—I don't pretend to guess how—stripped the body of every vestige of identification and carried it out back of the dance-hall.

"Whoever did this knew who she was and all about her, and their first play, of course, will be to stall off her folks and keep them from learning that she came here and was buried here."

"But won't the newspapers print reports about it?" asked Sam.

"Items, yes," snorted Black Allen; "measly little items that tell nothing. You see, we're one thousand miles from nowhere and the telegraph-tolls are high. You'd have to shoot and kill six men on Main Street to get half a column in a San Francisco daily. That would mean fifteen lines in Omaha, ten in Chicago, and maybe five in New York. In the case of an unidentified woman, dead of unknown causes, according to a coroner's jury, you'd be lucky to get more than a paragraph in a Reno weekly. Young Mr. Benton knows this as well as I do, and it's possible that he may have rendered expert advice on the subject. You see, Mr. Smilax, we're up against a mighty tight case. I wired twenty newspapers a ten-word outline of the story and asked if they wanted one hundred words or more. I got back twenty replies, all carrying the same stock phrase, 'Nothing doing!' "

"How about advertising?" asked Sam quickly.

"I was just coming to that." Black Allen swung round in his chair and faced the budding bonanza-king of the Stillwater district. "I haven't the funds, and my effort to take up a public subscription failed. I——"

"Put down S. Smilax and R. H. Leaf for ten thousand dollars each," interposed Sam quietly.

"THAT'S fine of you, Sam!" exclaimed Black Allen, reaching out and gripping his companion's hand till the joints cracked. "I believe I've got the brains and the enthusiasm to solve this mystery and hang this crime where it belongs. Now there's no telling where this unfortunate woman came from. To be certain to reach her people, we'll have to put an ad. in about five hundred news-

Digitized by Google

papers, dailies and weeklies. It's got to be a comprehensive ad., giving a detailed description of the body and clothing, and it must also be carefully worded to conceal the trend of our inquiry. The tax for that alone will be about three thousand dollars for one insertion. It ought to run three times at least."

"Run it ten times, if you want to," said Sam. "I'll turn over the money to you as soon as the banks open to-morrow."

"There's no hurry about that," returned Allen, "for we can't put those ads. out from this camp. We had better make Reno the base of operations. If you can spare the time, you had better run up on the morning train. I'll write the ad. for you, and an editor friend of mine in Reno will put it out. I've already written him a history of the case. There are several reasons why I had better remain in Tonopah. There are three gentlemen I desire to keep pretty close tabs on."

"If you don't mind," objected Sam, "I'll send Rem Leaf up to Reno to handle that ad. He'll be in from Stillwater at dawn, and can make the morning train. I have a hunch that I may be of use to you down here. It's just a hunch, but my hunches are usually pretty good."

This suggestion was entirely agreeable to Black Allen, and, after a brief discussion of a few minor plans, the two young men departed from the sanctum of the *Tonopah Sun* to their respective rooms in the Mizpah Hotel.

CHAPTER V

THE LITTLE MAN IN GREEN PLAID

THE Pullman car that carried Remsen Halliday Leaf out of Tonopah next morning bore the classic name of *Ariadne*. It was a Pullman of ancient vintage, and the only classic feature it possessed was the name. What age had begun to do to its upholstery, the alkali dust of the desert had finished. The plush had been worn to a satiny finish and was cracked up and down and across the seams. The padding of the seats had shifted and, if you sat down hard you hit a set of springs about as cushiony as a picket fence. The wainscot was dull and bleary, the windows rattled, and the forward truck was equipped with two flat wheels.

It was over the forward truck with the two flat wheels that the tired-of-life and chronically disobliging Pullman-conductor placed young Mr. Leaf. It was a mean disadvantage to take of a weary man.

There were four other seats in the center of the car which were vastly more comfortable, but that misanthropic conductor was offended by the ex-gun-drummer's personal appearance. He didn't like Rem's green-plaid Norfolk jacket with the bulging pockets, and he didn't like the cut of the green-plaid trousers that went with them. Nor did he approve of the big rubber-rimmed spectacles and the dinky checkerboard golf-cap, nor yet of the Nile-green silk shirt with its loose collar and flowing, purple Windsor tie.

True enough, it was a rather nightmarish ensemble, but the little chap who affected it was as generous-hearted and big-souled a human as ever came down through the races of Adam. His one failing was weird clothes, and, since he had fallen into the riches of the Yellow Horse mine, he had indulged himself to the limit, buying his wardrobe in carload-lots from the great clothing-establishments of New York and London that he had longed to patronize while pursuing the uncertain and none too lucrative calling of gun-drummer.

"There's going to be trouble on this train, sure as blue sky," gloomed the conductor to Alexander Magnus Hemp, the Senegambian porter. "A suit of clothes like that 'd throw the Overland Limited off the track. I wish something would happen so we could lose him. If there's one thing I detest in this world, it's a man who dresses himself up like a circus horse."

"What foh you don't like them clothes, Mr. Winterberry?" grinned the porter. "They certain'y look good to me, an' the gen'l'man what is wearin' 'em don't carry nothin' but gold into them an' cusses you down beautiful if you offers him change. He ain't much fer size, Mr. Winterberry, but I 'clare to goodness he's got a good heart."

Mr. Winterberry snorted his disgust and went off through the car to minister to the discomforts of several late arrivals.

BY A singular coincidence, just as that son of gloom who had been born into the Winterberry family was expressing the wish that Fate might aid him in dropping Rem Leaf off the train, a

Digitized by Google

whispered discussion was going on in the solitary stateroom of the Pullman with a similar subject for its theme. If the Pullman conductor had paused at the door and stuck his ear to the keyhole, he might have been rejoiced at the exclamation:

"We've got to chuck him off, dead or alive, and it's got to be done just as mortal soon after sundown as we can make it. Our orders are to keep that ad. out of the papers till we reach the girl, and stall her off. It certainly was lucky Jim Falkner got the room next to that Smilax person's and happened to get wise to the conversation when this wart in the green suit came along."

This was only a fragment of the talk that went on in the *Ariadne's* lone stateroom, which had been taken possession of by three men shortly before Rem Leaf came aboard. There was a good deal of *chili con carne* profanity mixed in, and when the name of Robert Kennedy Allen came to the surface it was prefixed and affixed with brimstone epithets.

To return to Remsen Halliday Leaf: at the time the gentlemen three were discoursing in the seclusion of their stateroom, he was engaged in the utterly unremunerative task of pouring out the tale of his discomfort into the large but not receptive ears of a plush-lined, satin-finished Chinaman, a certain Wong Duck, who was a made-in-a-minute millionaire through his taking up the richest placer-claim in Round Mountain.

Wong Duck had been awarded the seat opposite Rem Leaf by Conductor Winterberry. The Celestial's seat was every bit as lumpy and excruciatingly corduroyed as Rem's, but the Chink hadn't been riding in a mountain-buckboard the greater part of the previous night. Furthermore, he had bitten off a chunk of raw opium, which was soothing him mightily, so that he could have sat on a three-pronged spike and sensed that he was recumbent on a bed of softest swan's-down, with forty beautiful child-wives to fan him.

"I'm going to write the president of this road a letter that'll make his hair curl," raved Rem, as he bounced from one end of the seat to the other and banged the springs with his fist. "Here I'm out of bed two days, and no chance of making Reno till midnight. It's a dirty, screaming, shrieking outrage. They take your good money for luxuries and then turn you loose in a reeking caboose with hogback seats. I'd just as soon ride the brake-beams."

"Roast him plenty good," nodded Wong Duck, with a complacent smile. "Wong Duck alle same feel fine." The Celestial's smile rode up both cheeks and looped to his ears.

Rem Leaf glowered through his goggles at the encompassing smile, sank back limply and muttered:

"You dope-eating heathen Chinee! Like 'em plenty, eh? Well, I hope they build 'em like this in that hop-joint heaven you are heading for."

Just then Alexander Magnus Hemp came along with a pillow Rem had sent for, and set skilfully to work to reduce some of the pangs of the little chap's discomfort. When he had at last settled his worn and weary body into a cushioned corner of the seat, he shut his eyes to avoid seeing the grinning face of Wong Duck, and slipped off into a doze.

The grating tattoo of the flat wheels of the car did not disturb his rest until the train began to slow down for a ten-minute stop at Mina. He came to with a bang then, and all his peevishness returned upon him. He wanted to vent some of his cayenne temper on Wong Duck, but that placid Oriental plutocrat had gone off into a grinning trance, sitting stiffly erect, as if he had turned to wood, and so he continued to sit when Rem Leaf got up and joined the procession of passengers who went out on the station platform to stretch.

The crisp ozone of the desert air braced him and refreshed him, and he soon found himself conversing with a round-faced blond young man whose clothes were only a few shrieks less shrill than his own. If he hadn't been so sleepy, he might have noticed that this amiable stranger, who had introduced himself off-hand as "Petey Brooks and a damned good sport if I do say it," smiled entirely with his mouth, his eyes, the while, searching eagerly with a ferret-like furtiveness.

"You look a bit off your feed, pal," said Petey Brooks, in his loud, hearty manner of good-fellowship. "How would a shot of real old Bourbon—1850 stock, cured in the wood—hit you? My friend, Mr. Wilkes, has got a demijohn of it in the stateroom."

Petey Brooks had sized his man at the psychological moment. While Rem Leaf wasn't in any sense a tippler, he had lived

Digitized by Google

long enough along the Ohio River to develop an epicurean taste for real old Bourbon; added to which, he felt in dire need of some sort of stimulant.

LIKE an innocent lamb he followed the genial and effusive Mr. Brooks back into the Pullman, and went on into the stateroom, as his host stepped aside to let him pass.

"A thirsty traveler with a corrugated palate, Wilkes, old chap," cried Rem's chance acquaintance over his shoulder, and as the diminutive scion of the Leaf family stepped into the stateroom, he found himself looking across a little card-table at a man whose appearance in itself was a stimulating shock.

At first glance, Rem Leaf is struck with the notion that he's looking into the face of some nightmare-bird. There's a hawk-beak, with a sharp hook bending down over a gash of a mouth, in which gleams a row of pointed teeth with the left-hand fang prominent and jutting over what answers for a lip. The hook-nose runs up into a pair of one-piece black eyebrows and under those eyebrows, set close together, are a pair of round little eyes, black as coals, sharp and glittering, dull and wicked, shifty and blinking, all in the same second's span. Buzzard's eyes, only more so, and with a higher human evil in them.

"A bird of prey if ever I saw one," thinks Rem and he feels a sort of nausea in the middle as he takes the hand that's offered, a hand with a grip of steel withes, but a moist, clammy palm.

The chubby person with the broad-acre grin and loud cheeriness of manner who had lured Rem Leaf to the stateroom on the promise of a nip of 1850 Bourbon was treading on Rem's heels as they entered, and he swiftly maneuvered the door, shutting it noiselessly and slipping the bolt before his guest even began to get an inkling that he was caught in a trap. He had also jostled Rem slightly and located his pocket artillery, which he removed with subtle legerdemain while his unwitting victim was getting the glad hand from Mr. Wilkes.

If R. H. Leaf had only stood behind the man who stood behind him, he would have sensed in a twinkling that, some time in the course of his ever-grinning career, Petey Brooks had been an accomplished dip, for it is no mean achievement to lift even two flat automatics from the pockets of as alert a citizen as Rem Leaf. Moreover, Petey Brooks lifted the toy cannon from two separate pockets with one hand, while the other hand was engaged in the act of shutting the door. It was a feat of pure art, and the unkindest critics of Petey Brooks had to hand it to him that he was superfine in this specialty.

"Glad to meet you, sir," said Mr. Wilkes, in a deep throaty voice, as he relinquished Rem's hand. "Meet my friend, Mr. Rent. Wake up, Rent—here's company," and Mr. Wilkes reached for what had at first appeared to Rem as a clutter of clothes cast in a heap on the lounge of the stateroom.

The hook-nosed gentleman shook the clothes into life and there slowly straightened up a ghostly pale man, utterly bald of hair. There wasn't so much as a suggestion of eyebrows above the albino pink eyes that glittered from between flabby, puffed lids. He came up sitting, with a lurch, as the train started and went shivering down a steep grade. And, as he sat up and swayed drunkenly, he produced from nowhere in particular a highly nickeled .44-caliber revolver, which he sighted for a bead between Rem Leaf's eyes.

CHAPTER VI

THREE THUGS IN A STATEROOM

THERE was a three-cornered laugh as Rem Leaf dropped his fists into his empty jacket-pockets, and the next thing he knew he was slammed across the stateroom, to land with his heels in the air, across one of the upholstered seats. The genial Petey Brooks was responsible for this pleasantry, and the laugh with which he accomplished it was almost a roar.

"Ain't he the cute child?" guffawed Brooks, slapping his knees and bending almost double. "So this is Mr. Smilax's little messenger-boy who is going up to Reno to put out a large contract of advertising. And do you know, boys, he used to be a gun-drummer before he and that sphinx-faced Smilax kid fell into a Stillwater bonanza. A gun-drummer and a gun-shooter too, but we have taken his little poppers away from him."

Rem Leaf had recovered his equilibrium,

Digitized by Google

and sat panting on the edge of the seat. His rubber-rimmed glasses had fallen off, and he recovered them mechanically and restored them to place. His quick mind had divined his desperate case, even as he was being hurled across the stateroom, and he bent all his will-power to recover his calm and put on a stolid front before the trio who had so neatly trapped him.

"Looks like I walked right into the web and found the spiders at home," he said defiantly, folding his arms and gazing steadily, first at the vulture-faced Wilkes and then at the flabby-looking, dough-colored man, who still covered him with the .44.

"Yes, little one," said Mr. Wilkes, bending back his lips so as to reveal all his unlovely teeth, "we have sort of scooped you into our bottle. I bet my fat friend, Petey, one hundred even that he wouldn't make it first try. I lose, and if you will kindly peel a century off your roll I'll pay up."

"Better take the whole roll and have the larceny over with," returned Rem, getting control of his easy drawl and tossing a thick wad of bills so that it fell on the card-table on which Mr. Wilkes was resting his elbows. "And would you like my jewelry, too, as part of this old-fashioned train-robbery?"

"No, you can keep that junk," spoke up Petey Brooks, who had dropped down beside his friend Rent.

"I suppose one of you pickpockets can lift that any time you want it?" said Rem, sugaring the insult with his sweetest tones.

"Cut that stuff out quick," snarled Petey Brooks, his face blotching red. He was up on his feet and starting across the floor, when Wilkes stopped him with, "Sit down, you —— fool! Do you want to start him yelping and draw a crowd? It ain't even safe to shoot him till sundown, and he's got to answer us a few questions before it's time for us to gag him—that is, if he shows any sign of squealing."

"You needn't worry about that," cut in Rem. "I learned how not to bleat before any of you gentlemen served your first terms in jail."

Even the feathers of Mr. Wilkes ruffled at this, and he whipped out a long crinkly knife and twisted it in his long fingers as if it were his favorite weapon.

"Look here, you half-portion of a man," he threatened, while his little eyes gleamed malevolently, "if you can't keep a civil tongue in your head, we'll just naturally have to slit it on the bias."

"I thought you wanted to ask me a few questions," Rem jerked out, feeling a bit hollow inside at sight of the knife and the evil way Mr. Wilkes handled it.

"I thought this little persuader would bring you around," chuckled Mr. Wilkes, winking at the grinning Petey Brooks and the smileless bald pal, who had again collapsed into a heap that suggested an unwholesome sort of snake.

IT REQUIRED only this malicious manifestation of mirth to rekindle the fire of Rem's courage, whereat he retorted, with a blaze of passion,

"Well, just to show you how much I think of you three highbinders and your Greaser persuaders, I'll announce at the start that you can cut out my tongue and work it with wires before you'll get a ghost of answer from me on any subject that is of interest to you. It's a lead-pipe cinch that none of you will take a chance of spilling any blood in this stateroom. What your game is, I don't get yet, though I'd bet diamonds to acorns that it's about as dirty an enterprise as ever was conceived by any whelp of hell."

Rem Leaf sat back, buttoned his lips and folded his arms. Mr. Wilkes, who had been slipping the knife back into its sheath, jerked it out again and started to his feet, his face livid with fury. At this there was a sharp hissing sound from the hairless Rent, who uncoiled himself in a flash and came up standing.

"Easy there, Jim," he said softly, but with a potent volume of command in his voice. "Put that sticker away—I don't like the looks of it myself. And the little chap is right. There's going to be no blood-spilling in this stateroom. All we want with this gentleman is a certain paper he got from his partner, Mr. Smilax, before he left the Mizpah Hotel. When he delivers that paper, then we'll try and make him comfortable till sundown, when we'll drop him as gently as possible out of the car-window, so that he won't arrive at Reno for a day or so, if ever. We might as well make this plain now, and cut out the melodrama. You and Petey Brooks make me sick with the way you overplay

Digitized by Google

your hand when you've got a sure thing."

"It's his nasty tongue that set me going," retorted Wilkes, while Petey Brooks muttered, "I don't see where you get off to butt in, when we did all the work."

Rent turned on Brooks with a volley of epithets that seemed to drive him back against the cushions. Where a few minutes before he had been the limp and negligent looker-on, he was now the master of two cowering tools. The transformation fairly took the breath out of Rem Leaf, and he had to admit to himself that he had fallen into the talons of a weird assortment of birds of prey. He had sensed that Wilkes and Brooks were a pair of tin-horn bad-men, who loved to torture their victims, but his impression of Rent had been that he was some sort of a dope-fiend who only displayed his vitality by incoherent spasms. Whoever and whatever he was, he was a tough customer, who could be counted on not to waste words in empty bluster.

Motioning Wilkes to go over and sit beside the squelched Brooks, the now manifest boss of the job in hand took his seat and turned his set and expressionless face upon the defiant little prisoner.

"Now, Mr. Leaf, will you kindly turn over the draft of that advertisement you got from your partner, Mr. Smilax?"

Rem Leaf looked into the unfathomable pinkish-brown eyes, thought hard for a moment, then reached in his pocket for his wallet and produced the memoranda Black Allen and Sam Smilax had prepared for him.

"To be a regular hero," he said, with a wry smile, "I ought to swallow this paper, but being as this is real life, I can see that you'd beat me to it by about four jumps. I suppose, Mr. ——"

"Alfred A. Rent 'll do for this trip," came the crisp answer.

"I suppose, Mr. Rent, that you realize just how far you and your partners are opening your hands. This job, outside of being a breach of the penal laws, will furnish my friends with the opening wedge they are looking for. There is a certain wise Chinaman named Wong Duck, who is making a business trip with me outside of this other matter. He's got my kick alongside of him, and he glimpsed your fat friend and me pretty close when we walked into this stateroom."

This was pure bluff on Rem Leaf's part, but while it made Petey Brooks and the hawk-faced Wilkes sit up and take notice, it failed to cause a ripple on the countenance of Mr. Rent.

"IN THAT case," the real man of the trio said tersely, "we'll have to take care of Mr. Wong Duck. Dead Chinamen make good confidants. It also might occur to us as the best plan to drop you out of the window while we're slipping down a grade fifty miles an hour, instead of on an upslant when the going is slow."

"Suit yourself," Rem Leaf gave him back. "You can't make a bargain with me if you promise to slip me out of this state-room on a cushion of lilies."

"Good nerve, son; good nerve," said Mr. Rent grimly. "However, if you'll kindly undress down to your skin I'll examine your clothing. Take your time about it—there's no hurry. While you're disrobing, I'll have a little confab with my friends."

Again Rem saw the wisdom of complying. He took his time about undressing, batting his brains for some scheme of escape. But no inspiration came. Three pairs of eyes followed his every move with basilisk intentness, and three pairs of hands sorted out his various articles of fine raiment and examined every stitch.

When it came to his boots, though, Mr. Rent shook the dust out of them and tossed them back to him; then his pink silk union-suit and his azure socks. He kept the rest of his clothing, and stuffed them in one of his grips.

"What's the idea of that?" asked Rem, hotly. "I'm particularly fond of those clothes."

"The idea is this," said Rent. "If you don't happen to fall light and are picked up cold, you won't be identified so thundering soon."

It suddenly occurred to Rem then that there might be a desperate chance in yelling for help. But the wily Mr. Rent again proved he was a man of swift divination. He got to his small victim in half a jump and shut off his wind with a hand that went plumb around Rem's throat.

Ten seconds later, Rem's feet were bound from ankle to knee and his mouth was stoppered with a knotted towel. Petey Brooks tore up the helpless victim's shirt into strips and used them to bind his feet. He was about to secure Rem's arms when Rent stopped him.

Digitized by Google

"That'll do," Rent said. "If he starts to work on that gag, I'll just crack him over the wrist with my gun-barrel. He's bound up tight enough; the sun is dipping, and it's pretty near time to slide him out. There are coyotes and maybe a wolf or two along this stretch of road. Let his hands be—there's a limit I can't cross."

CHAPTER VII

TO BE FOUND DEAD

THEY laid Sam Smilax's mining partner out on the lounge and waited for the cloak of night. The porter knocked on the door and said he had come to light the lamps. Rent called out to him to return in an hour, as they were taking a nap. There are no twilights in those Nevada altitudes, and dusk fell with the suddenness of a thunder-cloud.

One of the trio went to the heavy wide window and heaved it up. Rem Leaf wasn't thinking, for his mind had become numb. He had a vague notion of hearing the voice of Petey Brooks call out, "Here's the grade now, Rent—chuck him out. We're hardly crawling."

It was black as pitch in the stateroom when Rem felt himself lifted in a powerful pair of arms. He made no effort to struggle, but stiffened his body with every ounce of his strength, to resist the shock of the fall he feared. The train was moving in a series of heavy jerks. There was absolute stillness in the stateroom, and he could hear the hum of voices on the other side of the panels of the door. Next, he felt himself gliding into space.

He was shot out of the car-window as if he had been a billet of wood. He descended obliquely, feet foremost, with his legs rigid in their bonds and his arms held out to protect his face. In this fashion he landed against the incline of a rocky embankment and coasted down on his back, coming to an abrupt stop about twelve feet below the track level, and discovering, much to his amazement, that his legs were free. Part of the way down the embankment he had slid along a sharp edge of rock, which had snipped his rather flimsy shackles and also some of his hide. But there were no broken bones and, as he picked himself up and shook himself, he felt as whole and fit as ever he did in his life—and a whole lot madder.

The train, as already stated, was moving slowly up a difficult ascent, and there was still some of it going by when Rem Leaf got his wits in rein again and began to take his bearings. In that early stage of railroad-development in Southern Nevada they ran combination freight-and-passenger trains, wherefore there were two baggage-cars, two freight-cars, an empty coal-car and a caboose trailing the so-called palace-car, *Ariadne*.

The caboose, with its red tail-lights and its little red-curtained windows, came ambling along as Rem got the dust out of his eyes and the gag out of his mouth and looked up. He could hear all its flat wheels slatting an anvil chorus, which at that moment was not in the least distressing to his nerves. He had unshipped his fastidiousness with his scenic raiment, and his one burning thought was to get aboard that train, ride on to Reno and fulfil his mission for Sam Smilax and Robert Kennedy Allen.

For a man of midget proportions, hopping a caboose from the rear while it is in motion is no mean feat. Because of the nature of the embankment, it was impossible to make the steps. But he made it by an eyelash, as it were; after scaling the embankment and sprinting over the ties for about fifty yards. With two fingers and a thumb, he caught the iron rod of the platform-railing and held on, and, in another second or two, he walked into the caboose-door and gave two freight-brakemen the shock of their young lives.

IT WILL be remembered that the customarily amply appareled Remsen Halliday Leaf was garbed only in a pink union-suit, a pair of azure socks and English walking-boots. Seen in this guise, under the mystic glare of a smoking oil-lamp, he was more or less of a startling apparition.

Brakeman Casey reached for a black flask and Brakeman Yen Oleson reached for a sawed-off shotgun.

Before they had quite completed their reaching, Rem spoke,

"Don't shoot, boys—I'm real."

Brakeman Oleson dropped the gun, but insisted on going seconds on the flask. While the pair were imbibing, Rem Leaf

Digitized by Google

did some dynamic thinking and decided to conceal the fact of how he had come to debouch from the Pullman window and reëmbark via the caboose. A very good reason occurred to him for not going back through the train and revealing the outrage done to his person and property. He did not know until many days later that he had escaped death by a matter of a few hundred yards, as the inscrutable Mr. Rent had figured on dropping him down a canyon-slope.

"Well, where in blazes did you come from?" demanded Brakeman Casey, while Rem stood still, inventing his answer.

"It's a bet," replied Rem, taking a grimy overcoat down from a nail and losing himself in it. "'Twas a chill night for this uniform."

"A bet!" snorted Casey, running his thick fingers through his red pompadour. "It must be a hell of a bet to come up a mountainside fifty miles from nowhere and looking like you come off a balloon trapeze, an' with nothin' on but circus tights."

"'Tis a strong bet, I admit," responds Rem, borrowing a corncob-pipe, filling it with blackjack plug, lying near at hand on a table, and touching it off. He took a long inhale of the powerful weed and ran on:

"I bet a chap I could walk from Wabuska to Churchill, and to prove I hoofed it I had to take off an article of clothing every five miles and plant 'em by the trackside. I figured I could keep my pants on till sunset, when the party of the second part was due to meet me. Some way, I didn't get along fast enough."

Casey and Oleson emptied the flask in silence, whereat Casey went to a locker and brought out another one. He handed it solemnly to Rem Leaf and said,

"Take a long pull, and give us another one. I'm —— fond of fairy tales!"

Rem absorbed a gill or two and passed the flask back.

"If you don't mind, my friends," said Rem, "I'll stick to the first one. The real story is humiliating, and I've not got round to the point yet where I can tell it without going loco."

"He don't look so awful bazazza either, does he, Yen?" said Casey to Oleson.

The Swede smiled and rubbed his nose.

"I got it," cried Casey suddenly. "He's been playing poker with Buzzard Wilkes and his outfit. They peeled him close and slid him out a window. They did it three years back to an Omaha drummer and had to shy the sage-bush boundaries for more than two years. The drummer died and his folks sued the S. P. for damages. The road hired twenty Pinkerton men to hunt Wilkes and two of his pals on the trains for more than a year, but they dropped out of sight. How about it, my giant friend—am I keen?"

Rem took the shock without a blink and shook his head. Then he bent down and took off one of his shoes, extracting from the toe a twisted wudge of saffron bank-notes—ten thousand dollars in all, with the one-thousand-dollar bills inside. He peeled off two one-hundred-dollar bills, handed one to Casey and one to Oleson, and said,

"You gentlemen will oblige me if you let the mystery lie. If you'll stow me away somewhere and keep your faces locked tighter 'n a vault, there's five hundred dollars apiece in it for you when we make Speedy Thurston's Palace in Reno. Is it a go?"

It was, with some to spare, and by the time Fussy Dawson, the cross-grained conductor of the freight, came back to the caboose from a visit up forward in the *Ariadne*, Rem Leaf was sleeping sound in the woodbox, smiling bland and childlike as he dreamed of roasting a Wilkes-faced bird and a bird-faced Wilkes on a spit, while the shadowy semblances of Messrs. Brooks and Rent were being dragged up to the roaring blaze by a band of grinning cannibals who acknowledged Rem as their king and witch-doctor.

CHAPTER VIII

A QUICK COME-BACK

WHEN the train pulled into Reno, the caboose trailed back on a siding in the railroad-yards. Every last passenger had detrained by the time Casey and Oleson hauled their little friend in the pink unions out of the woodbox and conducted him through back alleys to the shop of a clothing-merchant who hated to go to bed, whereupon there was only a brief lapse before Remsen Halliday Leaf, part-owner of the bonanza Yellow Horse, was his resplendent self again and holding close confab with Wilson Burke, editor of the

Digitized by Google

Reno Blade, who, not many years before, had covered police and the Barbary Coast with Black Allen in the California metropolis.

Burke's dinky little daily was going to press when Rem Leaf dropped in on him. There wasn't any need of introductions, as the Reno editor had a telegram in his fist that he'd got from Black Allen.

The message read:

Expect a small visitor wearing strange clothes. In re XYZ matter, and get busy.

When Rem Leaf had stated the vital points of his mission and testified briefly anent the Rent, Wilkes & Brooks concern, the slim, altitudinous, freckled and sunny-smiling Editor Burke emitted a long low whistle, got up and led the way into the enclosed niche he employed for a sanctum.

"There's the guiding hand of Fate in this thing, sure enough," began Burke, when he had provided his guest with his lone chair and a stout black cigar, while he perched on his desk and crossed his long legs. "Yes, Mr. Leaf, there's a large consignment of Kismet in this mystery, or I miss my guess. I got a long letter from Black Allen the other day, relating all the circumstances of the case, stating his theories and asking me to keep my eyes peeled for anything that might crop above the surface in Washoe County. Something cropped that morning, directly after I'd finished old Blackie's letter, and here it is—an ad. in the *Salt Lake City Herald*."

The young man dug a capacious black wallet out of an inside pocket and extracted a clipping, which he handed to Rem Leaf. The printed word read:

PERSONAL: Mother—return at once; I have found the Bakersfield quit-claim deed. Why do you not write or wire? MADGE.

Rem Leaf corrugated his eyebrows and shook his head.

"I don't make it," he said. "You see, they gave me the facts at express speed. I don't see the connection."

"The connection is this," said Burke. "Hank Benton, who does all the lovely promotion-literature for Jim Falkner, Sidney Horace Porter and the rest of that gang of wildcatters down in Tonopah, went through Reno a short while ago and dropped word that he'd been visiting Bakersfield to get color for some oil-prospectuses. You've read about the Bakersfield oil-boom. Well, it's big—tremendous! The Jim Falkner outfit has had wise information on Bakersfield oil for a year back, and they've had all their agents out trying to separate the owners of Bakersfield oil-property from their titles.

"They could have done this legitimately and cleaned up a barrel, but that's not their way. I happen to know a good deal about Jim Falknér. He's a congenital crook—yes, and worse. He wouldn't be satisfied with just hornswoggling the owners of Bakersfield property by giving them about one-fiftieth of the value of their holdings, but just as soon as he turned over the cash to them, he'd put some of his slick boys on their trail and take that cash back in exchange for wildcat stock.

"Knowing all this, and having digested the contents of Black Allen's letter, when I saw this ad. flaming up at me on the front page of the *Salt Lake City Herald*, I did some quick thinking and got busy with the Western Union. I telegraphed my brother, business-manager of the *Salt Lake City Herald*, to learn for me the name and address of the person who inserted the ad. He had to wire an advertising-agency in Denver, so that it wasn't until this afternoon that I got the name and address. Here it is, on this piece of paper—read it, to yourself, for even these partitions have ears."

Rem Leaf read: "Marjory Duer, Magnolia, Colorado."

Editor Burke tucked the slip of paper back into his vest pocket and pursued:

"Magnolia is a village, not a great way from Denver, on the Union Pacific Railroad. I have wired Miss Duer to take the first train for Omaha and to wait there at a respectable little hotel I know of. If you hadn't got here, I was going on to Omaha myself, on the Overland Limited, to-morrow. I expected to see some of Falkner's crowd on the train, but headed for Denver, not for Omaha."

"Hold on a minute," cut in Rem Leaf. "I'm not geared up to your gait yet—what are they going to Denver for?"

"In response to that ad., of course. Falkner's Reno man is a young chap, named Stalk. When I was in the Western Union office, telegraphing to my brother, he came in and sent a message down to Tonopah. I saw him cut the ad. out and

Digitized by Google

paste it in the middle of his telegram. He'd had his instructions to watch for that kind of an ad. Even if some of the Falkner gang hadn't eavesdropped your confab with Sam Smilax and Black Allen this morning—that is, yesterday morning; it's 3 A.M. now—he'd have sent out a skirmish-party of some kind to bluff Miss Duer into dropping her inquiry, or to stall her off in some way till they'd got their ends straightened out."

"I'M EVEN with you now, all right," exclaimed Rem Leaf. "In view of the kind of advertisement we were going to plaster all over the United States, it was up to them to play a strong hand to prevent the circulation of that ad. until the young lady was reached. I wouldn't put it past Mr. Rent and his two fine assistants to double up their crime with the murder of the daughter. Slipping me out a car-window to trip the light fantastic down a canyon-cliff was just a 'tween-meal. Whew! I didn't think hell had any duplicates like these on earth!"

"A considerable population of them," said Editor Burke grimly, "or else the newspapers wouldn't be crowded with unaccountable disappearances all the time."

"How are you sure that girl will go to Omaha?" Rem Leaf asked suddenly. "How did you sign your telegram?"

"'Mother.' I hated to do it, but brutal as it may seem, it is also necessary. If we're going to the bottom of that affair down in Tonopah, we've got to reach Miss Marjory Duer before any of this other outfit can get to her. I don't think they would dare do any telegraphing, for telegrams are court-records. Now if you've got a capable friend you can trust, here in Reno, you'd better get on his trail instanter, and engage him to make the journey to Omaha. The Overland Limited makes a stop at Summit at 7 A.M., on the way down to Reno. There's a freight going up at four-thirty. I learned to-night that the Omaha sleeper is almost empty, so you can climb in at Summit and annex a stateroom. When the Limited comes along here and picks up your three fine Falkner birds, you will already be snug in bed."

"Great idea," cried Rem. "They'll be in the Denver sleeper, anyway, and we'll drop them at Ogden, Utah. All I've got to do is keep sealed up in my stateroom till we cross the Mormon borders. It's going to require a power of self-restraint to keep me from re-introducing myself to Buzzard Wilkes *et al.*, but it's in a mighty good cause. Pink Reagan's in town, I hope."

"He is," Editor Burke assured him, "and his boarding-house is just half a shack from this office, corner of Washoe and Comstock streets. He's in love with the landlady's daughter—slim dark girl with lots of eyelashes; is on the water-wagon; has cut out eating tobacco, and goes to church regular. Stupefying case of reform, but he's getting rich as a cattle-broker. On your way, son! You've got to make that freight! Fetch Pink here. I'll be waiting. While you're gone, I'll write out a list of things that may be of service to you, also a full report to Black Allen."

Rem Leaf had scarcely abandoned the sanctum-chair and sped away in search of a certain strawberry blond who'd won fame as a two-gun man before the down began to freckle his lip, when Editor Burke flung himself into it and began writing rapidly—first, a letter to Robert Kennedy Allen, editor of the *Tonopah Sun*, and then a dozen sheets of suggestions for R. H. Leaf to con at his leisure on the Overland Limited.

CHAPTER IX

JOEL TRIGGS OF THE PANHANDLE

BY THE time Wilson Burke's letter reached the hands of Black Allen, Rem Leaf and Pink Reagan had crossed the Continental Divide and were sliding through the Nebraska hog-belt. It was a special-delivery registered letter that brought the young sage-brush journalist to the low, rambling shack that served as the Tonopah post-office. He stepped through the doorway just in time to hear a big voice proclaiming, "None of your —— business what I want to see Mr. Allen about! Make a cud of that, my nosey friend, and swallow it down. If it won't go down, I'll choke it down."

Once inside the post-office, Black Allen saw that the large voice emanated from a large man whose face and figure were totally unfamiliar. From where he got first glimpse of him, Allen observed that his shoulders were about as broad as the back of a hack,

Digitized by Google

that his arms were of mighty proportions, and that he wore loose-fitting clothes and the style of Stetson indigenous to the Texas Panhandle. It was also swiftly noted by the Tonopah editor that the large voice had been directed at that suave and oleaginous person who was affectionately referred to as Willie the Lush by the Jim Falkner crowd.

Willie the Lush, in his satiny, smooth way, had insinuated himself into the conversation the stranger had struck up with Postmaster Webb. Learning that the stranger was seeking Black Allen, this wily dry-souse, having his orders to keep close tabs on the Allen-Smilax combination, had presumed somewhat on the appearance of the stranger and had sought to pump him.

The voice and the sudden out-thrust of the big salient jaw barely missed driving the inquisitive gentleman through a wooden partition. He was mumbling some apology when the subject of inquiry touched the stranger on the arm and said:

"I guess I'm the Allen you're looking for."

The big Texan wheeled round and, the instant Black Allen got full focus of him, the realization struck home that a new brand of prodigy had wafted into the high altitudes. The bulk of the man was a distinct jar to even his splendidly controlled faculties. The smile that leaped into life under the drooping sandy mustache, the abundance of sunny freckles in the deep-bronze tan and the twinkle in the dark blue eyes soon dissipated the effects of the first shock, and he submitted his hand to a mammoth fist without any further qualm.

"I come a long way to see you, Mr. Allen," said the big man in tones that boomed with sincerity and earnestness. "I waited to look you up at the post-office, as my business is personal and private, and I wanted to dodge butt-ins of the breed I just spoke at. Get your mail, lad, and lead me to your cave."

A few minutes later this dropped-from-the-skies giant had been inducted into the *Tonopah Sun* office and introduced to Black Allen's dog, Chaw; Jimmy Silk, the devil; and Bugs Blossom, the one-man composing-room force. He had made his identity known to Allen when he was clear of the gaping throng on Main Street and bulging his way down through the narrow alley that led to the printing-office. With his arm about Allen's shoulder, he had bent down and rumbled confidentially.

"JOEL TRIGGS is the name, from down Texas way. Got a little bunch of eighty thousand short-horns on the range. Raise long-horns, too, and hell occasional, though mostly I'm a kitten. That'll do till you go through your mail and clear your mind."

Mr. Triggs had to wait for Black Allen to read and re-read Wilson Burke's letter, but Jimmy Silk entertained him, and also profoundly interested him, by a graphic account of the latest shooting-affair in the Glad Hand. Yet notwithstanding the somber attention he gave to the midget Jimmy, one of the colossal Texan's keen blue eyes covered Editor Allen and noted the eagerness and emotions with which he read Burke's letter.

He waited patiently until Allen called to him, then sat down in the lone guest-chair with consideration for its comparative frailty, crossed his great limbs and began in what he imagined was a subdued drawl:

"Now, my young friend, I may not have anything so exciting to communicate as the contents of that letter, though I won't say my errand to these parts is peaceful. I come here to look up, and if the facts warrant, to speak my mind out free and untrammeled to a party of swindlin' thieves who took advantage of an old spinster aunt of mine, who had a little farm and a few thousand dollars in the bank up El Paso way.

"You'll notice, Mr. Allen, that I say 'had' in speaking of that farm and the little bank-roll. Those grafters got it all. Taking inventory later, it don't seem they left Aunt Sally so much as a rain-barrel and a tin dipper. O' course, they hands her a beautiful engraving, with a gilt frill border. It's the customary wild catter's receipt.

"Like the game old girl she is, Aunt Sally waited till that fine, moss-whiskered elder of her church foreclosed the mortgage and bought in her six cows, two calves and eight Berkshires under the hammer. She wrote a few letters and sent a couple of telegrams, but the board of directors are not in session to receive and answer inquiries. Her last little wisp of bank-notes goes to

Digitized by Google

a wedge-faced crook of a lawyer in payment for the information that she's been stung legal. She swallows this last gall capsule without batting an eyelash, and begins hard labor over a sewing-machine got on the instalment-plan, to keep her in bed and board.

"Not a word of this gets down to me in the flatlands of Duval County, simply because it ain't in the Triggs blood to whimper. You see, I'd helped her along a bit, and she figured it out she'd rather die by slow torture than confess to her wild and unregenerate nephew that she, a thirty-two degree Presbyterian, had taken a flyer in a get-rich-quick scheme. I'd probably never got a whisper of it till the funeral, if I hadn't taken a sudden notion in my head to run up and see her.

"When I'd dragged her story out of her and sent the sewing-machine instalment-man and that slag-hearted old squeeze-penny deacon to a convenient hospital—no, I didn't lose my temper with the old chap—just gave him the brotherhood grip and dislocated his handwriting for a tolerable spell—I moved Aunt Sally down to Austin and settled her comfortable. I bought from her that lovely engraving she'd been hornswoggled into buying, paying her by force the exact and similar sum it had cost her.

"Now, my young friend, there may be some close an' canny business-men who'd say that was a —— fool investment. Mebbe it'll prove so and mebbe it won't. I've got a forty-eight-ounce Colt with a seven-and-one-half-inch barrel, which shoots blunt-nosed bullets of equal dimensions to gooseberries, tucked into the tail of this Prince Albert, which is going to represent me as counsel. Your old friend, Wally Townsend, who writes pieces for the *Austin Daily News*, advised me that I might win my case if my blue-metal attorney kept up the reputation it's established in the Panhandle. Likewise, Mr. Townsend sends his best regards and vouches for Mr. Joel Triggs on the back of this visiting-card. You'll notice he attaches the title 'Major,' which don't belong, though there's some what likes to mouth it at me when they want to borrow money.

"Mr. Allen, I've spun my prelude and delivered my credentials. As for you, you sized up to specifications first gaze, so if you can give me a few spare minutes of your time, I wish to ride herd on the officers and crew of a certain rotten craft known as the Lone Star Extension Mine."

THE big Texan had fixed and held Black Allen's attention from the moment he began to speak. The thrilling facts contained in Wilson Burke's letter had been for the moment completely submerged. But, at the mention of the Lone Star Extension, they came surging back with a rush, and the young man's face and eyes fairly blazed with animation.

"The Lone Star Extension!" he gasped, then choked and fought to control his agitation.

"The same, my boy," boomed the big voice of Joel Triggs, "why——"

Black Allen checked him, with a swift commanding gesture.

"Not so loud, Major—that is, Mr. Triggs."

"Make it Joe, lad. I'm not much over forty, and I reckon we're goin' to be good playmates. But why the air of mystery and the low murmur? Down in the Panhandle——"

"I'll explain that later," Allen stopped him. "I'm riding herd, as you put it, on the same outfit, only more so. It's a different sort of case, and requires more delicate handling. This letter I've just been reading brings us hot on the trail we'd been groping for. If it's all the same to you, we'll join forces and add our two accounts into one. You've got a plenty good and sufficient cause to join us and go the limit with us. My friend Sam Smilax is waiting for me up at Doc Stubbs's bungalow. We'll go right up there, and on the way up I'll give you an idea of the kind of problem we're working out and the kind of animals we've got to deal with."

"I'm your man," said the big Texan grimly. "I hadn't really counted on letting myself out in handling Aunt Sally's little affair. I hate to waste lead on sneak-thieves or cattle-rustlers when I can do tolerably well with my hands."

"This isn't a case of theft," said the editor of the *Tonopah Sun*, quietly, as he hastily scribbled a few orders for Jimmy Silk. "It's the case of a thug-murder of a woman of the kind we'd be glad to call mother or sister. If the known facts don't make your blood boil, I miss my guess.

Digitized by Google

Here, Jimmy, quit teasing Chaw and take charge of the office. If there are any telegrams, give 'em to Chaw and he'll find me."

CHAPTER X

THE HOP-JOINT RING

FOUR men sat about the one pretentious piece of furniture in Dr. Horatio Stubbs's two-room bungalow—a combination operating, dining and library table—talking in low and earnest tones. The mild and delicately framed young physician sat opposite the vast Joel Triggs, and, try as he might, could not get out of his head the idea of the wondrous possibilities of exploring such an anatomy as the Texan's in the interest of medical science. The Doc had placed a decanter of one-hundred-and-fifty-proof Cognac in front of the cattle-king of the Panhandle, and his eyes had all but popped out on his pale cheeks when he saw Mr. Triggs toss down half a tumbler of the fiery liquid without fluttering an eyelid. The Doc himself had strangled on a teaspoonful; Sam Smilax preferred coffee, as was always his custom, and Black Allen kept his throat moist with a Napa-soda lemonade, which was one of the specialties of Sui Lung, the Doc's fairy-footed little China boy.

"The records show," Black Allen was saying, "that the directors of the Lone Star Extension were all dummies, and that their names were signed to all official documents. The proceeds of all stock-sales, however, flowed into the hands of Jim Falkner, Alf Rent and Sidney Horace Porter. Buzzard Wilkes, Hank Benton and Petey Brooks drew commissions as stalls and feeders. But there is one other man who has been in on the big pickings—Straight-Flush Hawkins, the slickest gambler who ever manipulated a deck on the Pacific Coast. 'Handsome Hawkins' I've heard him called by some, and the evidence is that he is no tin-horn, and is just as deft with hardware as he is with the pasteboards."

"Smooth face with a satin finish like a woman's, blond hair and lots of pretty teeth?" broke in Sam Smilax, who had been listening in graven solemnity, without saying a word, for an hour.

"So Jimmy Silk got it from Percy Hayes, one of Falkner's stenographers," replied Allen. "Why, did you ever run across him up at Speedy Thurston's, Sam?"

"No," Sam shook his head, "but I heard a queer story about him once. Rawhide Pete brought the story up from Sacramento, where he'd been tending wheel at the Judith. Yarn was that Hawkins, togged up as a woman, got into the hotel-room of a diamond-drummer. Drummer found dead on the floor, one hundred thousand dollars' worth of stones gone. No shooting; no stabbing; no noise. It was one of those death-from-natural-causes cases, and the body was shipped east before the robbery was discovered. The drummer had been to the theatre with a woman companion, and Rawhide Pete passed them going in. He swears the woman was this man Hawkins, in a blonde female wig and full feminine drapery.

"Now this may be only a dream of Pete's, though you can't convince him so. A month after that drummer cashed, Hawkins and Jim Falkner swung their first big wildcat, and cleaned up close to a million. Of course, this is only second-hand."

"And where is this Mr. Hawkins now?" asked Joel Triggs. "Seems to me I've heard a name like that connected with some of the Texas oil-wildcats."

"Oil it is," flung back Black Allen, "only not Texas. He's in Bakersfield oil, and only recently got hold of one of the biggest gushers in the district."

"Bakersfield!" cried Doc Stubbs, excitedly. "Why——"

With a lightning swift movement, Sam Smilax reached out his hand and covered the Doc's mouth, uttering as he did so, "There's somebody at the door."

At sight of the mammoth Colt that materialized from Joel Triggs's coat-tail pocket as if it had flown into his great fist, Doc Stubbs slid under the table. Nor was the great bulk of the Texan any seeming handicap to his movements. In getting to his feet and covering the door, he wasn't a second behind Black Allen, nimble as that young man was in handling himself and his artillery.

The day was just giving way to the blanketing drench of night, which falls without any intervening twilight in the Nevada solitudes. The quick ears of Sam Smilax had caught, even amid the hum of conversation in the room, a faint rustle

Digitized by Google

outside the door, followed by an apologetic tapping, a diffident, fearful sort of tapping, as if the tapper sensed the peril of any more boisterous intrusion.

Sam Smilax started for the door, when the Texan reached out his hand and caught him by the arm.

"I've seen men plugged through a door-panel before this," he said, under his breath. "Invite the party in."

"Come in," said Sam promptly, at the same time breaking from the Texan's grasp and skipping lightly to the other side of the door.

"It's a friend," croaked a hoarse, wheezing voice.

Black Allen recognized the voice in an instant and laughed gustily, putting away his guns.

"Come in, Whiskers," he shouted, and motioned to Joel Triggs to stow his baby cannon.

IN THE few seconds that had passed, it had grown pitch dark. Sam Smilax struck a match as he opened the door, and the yellow flare revealed the bewhiskered countenance of Reginald Burgess, famed in the Great Basin as the man who had converted three perfectly good gold-mines into rum and himself into a hopeless derelict. Whiskers Burgess was the name he had gone by since he had attached himself to the Tonopah boom and its thirty-six saloons.

The mention of his name caused Doc Stubbs to crawl out from under the table, on his hands and knees, and call to his Chinese servant for a light. Sui Lung arrived in time to illuminate the nervous and halting entrance of the hirsute visitor, whose nervousness and hesitancy immediately vanished, however, when his glance fell upon the sparkling decanter of Cognac.

From the decanter, his roving eye traveled to the vast figure of Joel Triggs and rested there, rolling in wonder and alarm. There was that in his glance to suggest the fear that he was seeing things.

"Well, Whiskers, what can we do for you?" said Black Allen sharply.

The unkempt Burgess came to with a start, again ravished the decanter with his eyes, moistened his lips and said, in a cracked voice:

"Beg pardon, gents, but Jimmy Silk sent me up here—fine boy, that Jimmy, sharper 'n a ferret. Good manners, too—calls me Mr. Burgess, drunk or sober, and shakes hands like a man. He—he——"

Whiskers Burgess suddenly clutched his throat and was seized with a paroxysm of coughing, and, as he coughed, he inched nearer and nearer to the corner of the table where the decanter of Cognac rested.

Black Allen swiftly interpreted the maneuver and poured out a drink, saying, as he offered it,

"Look here, Whiskers, if it's only a drink you wanted, toss this down and vamoose. If you're just snooping round to carry messages to any one, you'd better say your prayers first the next time you try it out."

Whiskers Burgess shook his head violently as he hastily drained his glass and set it down.

"Nothin' of the sort," he retorted, with a feeble effort at dignity. "It's this way, and I won't spill words. It concerns the death of that woman, Mr. Allen. O' course, you don't need to listen if you're too busy, or if these other gents ain't interested. I can go back to the shop and sit 'round with Jimmy, only he told me I'd better come up here right sharp, an' he an' the dog come along with me most of the way. You see——"

"Sit down, Whiskers," said Black Allen quickly, pulling a chair out from the wall and placing the ragged guest conveniently near the decanter.

There was something in the camp drunkard's manner that was peculiarly impressive. Joel Triggs, Sam Smilax and Doc Stubbs resumed their chairs. Black Allen completed the circle, after he had double-bolted the door and pulled down the shades of the two windows.

The deference that was suddenly accorded the visitor rather disconcerted him for a moment, but when he had bitten in two the plug of tobacco the big Texan offered with a gruff, "Make a meal of it, pard, it's good for the voice," he revived again and said, huskily,

"I heard tell of a ring once, gents, that was sure death if the party what wore it swung it against your skull, any part of your skull that capped-in your brain. This ring had a needle inside of it, worked by a stiff spring. It don't take much more 'n a tap of this ring to operate the spring and shoot the needle into your brain. There's a

Digitized by Google

powerful poison on the tip of this needle, and once there's a puncture through the bone, the job is done. Do you get me?"

"Yes; yes, we get you!" gasped Doc Stubbs, who had bent forward eagerly, with his elbows on the table and his chin in his hands. Taking advantage of the tense interest of his auditors, Whiskers Burgess boldly helped himself to a drink and absorbed it with a grateful smacking of the lips.

"Engine needs oilin'," he said apologetically and then went on:

"Now I'd never 'a' thought of this ring, gents, if it hadn't been for Jimmy Silk. I stepped into the *Sun* office yesterday to borrow two-bits from Jimmy, and I found him sitting at Mr. Allen's desk, drawing circles on a piece of paper. First he'd make a dot and then a little circle round that; then a bigger circle round the little circle. He'd filled up a big sheet of paper with these drawings.

"'What's all that truck?' I says to Jimmy, forgettin' all about the two-bits I'd come for.

"'It's a clue,' says the kid, lookin' up with them sharp little eyes o' his.

"'A clue to what?' says I.

"'A clue to murder,' says he.

"'Whose murder?' says I.

"'THAT woman's,' says he. 'The pretty wŏman whose body Chaw found out back of Jack's dance-hall.' I was hazier 'n usual, gents, an' my mind works like it's clogged with lead. It'd never come to me, nohow, if that composing-room gent, Bugs Blossom, hadn't stepped up to bat with a flask. One nip, and those circles dancing afore my eyes tips up something way back in my mind—that Chinese ring I heard tell of in old Wan Yup's hop joint down in 'Frisco. Wan Yup grub-staked me for the killing I made in the Black Hills, and we were pretty good friends till I'd blown in the last pint of dust.

"You got to excuse me, gents, if I ramble some, for I ain't played fair with this little old brain of mine, an' it's on'y clear in spots. It's clear on this point, howsomever—Wan Yup mentions this Chinese ring to me an' tells me a —— of a yarn about it, an' while he's doin' it, he draws a little circle with a dot into it and then a bigger circle round the little circle.

"I wish I could drag back his language, but it won't come. It was something like, 'Sabe him dot needle, sabe him—' he makes the circle—'spring.' As I made out his language, his circle represented the outside ridge which fitted into the seal part of the ring. The notion he gave me was that when this ridge hit anything it gave a little and released the spring that drove the needle."

The frowsy narrator stopped suddenly, as if something inside of him had suddenly run down, and with a trembling hand again reached for the decanter. Joel Triggs intercepted the maneuver and slid the decanter down the table.

"Ease up there, pardner," he said pleasantly. "Another jolt or two of that stuff 'll knock you cold. Doc Stubbs has got something better nor brandy to clear out the fog. Give him a hypo. of ammonia, Doc. He's got to an interesting point where we can't let him fade on us."

Burgess whined a protest and pleaded that liquor was the only stimulant that could keep him going. But when Doc Stubbs brought the hypodermic syringe, he yielded docilely to the will of the giant Texan, and, as the ammonia was shot into his pickled system, he braced amazingly, stopped trembling and took full grip of himself.

"Now, go on," commanded Triggs. "What more did the Chink say about the ring?"

The drunkard paused only a moment, then launched ahead.

"He told me that ring had been used by one of the tongs for thirty years, and he ran off on his fingers the total of deaths it had figured in. He told me no white man had ever seen the ring, but that one or two of his hop customers knew about it and had tried to buy it; wanted to use it in their business, which was highway-robbery. Then he laughed one of those Chink laughs that ain't got any sound, and shook his head. He worked me all up to a curious heat and I begged him to let me get a look at the ring, just to see how it worked. Nothing doing—now there's the story, gentlemen, to the best of my present memory. Sounds like a hop-dream, but it ain't. I used to gamble a lot in Wan Yup's place, but I never hit the pipe."

"How long ago was that?" asked Black

Digitized by Google

Allen, who had been scowling hard at Burgess, as if trying to piece something together in his mind.

"Twenty years," came the prompt reply.

"And Wan Yup is still alive?"

"He sure is. He came down to this camp no more 'n a month ago, with Straight-Flush Hawkins. I stumbled on to him coming out of Jim Falkner's office an' touched him for a pair of twin eagles."

THIS startling information was received in intense silence. Its unexpected suddenness fairly stunned the four men, whose better reason had been arguing with them that Burgess's story of the ring was little better than an alcoholic raving. The miserable victim of his own ungoverned appetites looked from one to the other dully, misreading the grim set of their faces as a failure on his part to make good with any information of value.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," he said regretfully. "I didn't see myself how this yarn was worth anything in connection with the case of that woman. It was Jimmy Silk who sicked me on to you, but, naturally, him being a kid and having his mind full of circles, he didn't know any better."

"That's all right, Whiskers—cheer up," laughed Black Allen. "The story was interesting, even if you dreamed it."

"It ought to be worth another drink, anyhow," leered Burgess, his mind becoming consumed again by the psychic as well as physical yearning for drink.

"Only under the doctor's orders," Allen replied. "I'll consult with Doc Stubbs a moment. If he says so, all right."

Taking Doc Stubbs to one side, he whispered:

"We've got to keep him in this bungalow till we hear from Rem Leaf and learn that girl's story. He's sure to go babbling the name of Wan Yup and the tale of that ring all over camp. The way our case is building up, we can't take any chances on showing so much as the corner of a card."

"A dose of laudanum is what he needs," responded Doc Stubbs. "I'll mix some in a drink of whisky. It'll put him to sleep in ten minutes. He's pretty close to the D. T.'s as it is, and only opiates will save him. I've got a pet booze-cure in my cabinet which I'd like to try out on him later. If it works, he'll be in a state of mild syncope for a week."

"What if it don't work?" asked Allen.

"If it don't work," said Doc Stubbs, "he will sleep all the harder."

With which medico-philosophic observation the Tonopah Esculapius slipped away to his labratory to mix the dope.

By the time he returned to the room, Whiskers Burgess had developed another case of shakes and was bleating miserably for more alcohol. He was disgustingly eager to compromise on any sort of spirits, and ten minutes afterward, almost to the second, he dropped off into profound coma and was disposed of in a curtained-off bunk in the rear of the bungalow.

It was not until many hours later that the conference he had intruded upon adjourned, and Doc Stubbs's three guests departed to the secluded shack on the outskirts of the camp where Sam Smilax and Black Allen had secretely taken up and maintained their abode, to the great puzzlement and annoyance of certain gentlemen who desired to see more of them and watch their every movement. The fact that the *Tonopah Sun* had suddenly and unaccountably ceased publishing any reference to the death of the *unidentified woman* was an added source of discomfort and bafflement to the very men who had been denouncing the early frank statements and screaming head-lines which Black Allen had flung upon the community.

And it may also be observed here that the sudden vanishment of the gigantic stranger whom Willie the Lush had encountered in the post-office had such an effect upon his nerves that he found great difficulty in affecting that jovial appearance of being three-sheets-in-the-wind which he employed so successfully as a cloak for his sharp practises.

CHAPTER XI

"HANDS ALOFT, GENTLEMEN!"

THE hum and bustle of the day's stock-jobbing and bubble-contriving in the Tonopah Arcade had died down and there had come upon the camp that brief lapse of slumberous repose which customarily preceded the evening's hilarity and the night's unlidded license. In the office of the United Syndicated Mines, Limited—highly impressive if meaningless title—there remained only the three moving-spirits of

Digitized by Google

the organization, James Buchanan Falkner, Sydney Horace Porter and Hank Benton.

They were not expecting visitors, and they were grouped about a square desk, talking in low tones. An eavesdropper would have been sorely vexed to make anything out of the few words that rang prominently in the buzz of their talk, unless such names as Alf Rent, Buzzard Wilkes and Petey Brooks, accompanied by profane and angry epithets, carried their own deep significance.

It was not until almost immediately before their startling interruption that the big man (both physically and mentally) of the trio let his voice soar for a moment, ripping out, "Not a —— line or wire to show they're on this side of hell."

The United Syndicated Mines, Limited, occupied the most commodious office-room in the crudely wrought structure known as the Tonopah Arcade. This was due to the fact that three of the box-stall compartments opening upon the single corridor, so-called arcade, of the building had been thrown into one.

Moreover, this office sported a real oak door with a ground-glass panel, quite a contrast to the flimsy and unpretentious bath-house doors which served as portals for neighboring wildcatters, lawyers, brokers and mining-engineers who tenanted the building. Yes, and the office itself was vastly more pretentious than anything of the sort thus far inflicted upon Nevada high altitudes.

The square desk in the center of the room was of real mahogany, there were a dozen or so mahogany chairs scattered about, a row of little tables supporting typewriters flanked one of the walls, and, at either side of the two windows looking out upon the desolate sage-brush area, back of Jack's dance-hall, stood two mahogany cabinets filled with specimens of gold-bearing quartz, each specimen labeled with the name of some alleged bonanza-mine. To the right of the highly polished and richly glowing desk was a tall safe with its door left negligently open, enabling the casual visitor to feast his eyes upon a wealth of nuggets of virgin gold, glass jars filled with glittering pebbles and finely powdered rainbow-dust.

Indeed, there wasn't a better equipped web for the unwary anywhere in the broad expanses of Esmeralda County. The rough-planed walls, too, bore their mute testimony of the fabulous wealth of the Southern Nevada desert in the shape of spacious maps and blue-prints of the mines which were to yield from one hundred to one thousand per cent. to the fortunate mortals who got in on the ground floor.

The several anemic-looking male typists who pounded out the syndicate's letters, manipulated the syndicate's mimeograph and enveloped the bales of circulars and prospectuses which the syndicate printed on its own press in the near-by alley, had been dismissed for the day, only a short while before Falkner and his two younger understudies fell to talking so earnestly and with such carefully subdued vehemence.

Falkner, a strong man every inch of him, his short black beard serving to enhance rather than conceal the salient set of his jaw, sat up close to the desk in his leather-upholstered swivel-chair, his elbows planted squarely in front of him and his big, carefully manicured hands gripped tightly together. While he talked, he chewed viciously on the stub of an unlighted cigar, and occasionally he spat for emphasis without removing the cigar. The blasé yet excruciatingly alert Porter and the boyish-looking and furtive-eyed Hank Benton sat to the right and left of him, diagonally opposite, tilting nervously in their chairs and fairly eating their cigarettes.

SUCH was the picture in this gold-lure bait-factory, when the door swung open, burst from the bolts which secured it on the inside as if they had been made of chalk. The sudden pressure of three hundred pounds of compact bone and brawn had caused that perfectly good solid-oak door to yield without so much as a creak of hesitancy.

Of course, the snapping bolts gave the alarm, but there wasn't sufficient interval thereafter for Mr. Falkner *et al.* to collect their startled senses. They just sat and gaped in frozen amazement at that whale of a Texan and his forty-eight-ounce Colt with its seven-inch stem gripped in a hand which enveloped the hilt and part of the barrel as the ordinary hand might fondle a derringer or as Remsen Halliday Leaf was wont to toy with his vest-pocket automatics.

There was so much of Joel Triggs and his portable howitzer coming in that he was several steps clear of the entrance

Digitized by Google

before the stupefied victims of the intrusion caught sight of Sam Smilax and Black Allen, a modest but efficient rear-guard, who hung back for a moment to reconnoiter the corridor, lift the door back into place and brace it shut with several chairs.

"Hands aloft, gentlemen," quoth Joel Triggs in purring tones. "The hammer of this Baby Six of mine is dreadful' nervous. Nor it won't do you a bit of good, Mr. Falkner, to press that button with your knee. Those three bruisers you keep on call out in the alley are up the street a bit, in the Glad Hand, breaking into their third magnum of extra dry. Likewise, we clipped the wire which connects with the buzzer. Nice work, Sam, and he won't bite you lessen he wants to swallow a large blunt-nose pellet of lead. Isn't it the gorgeous plumbing, though!"

Mr. Triggs referred to the pair of gold-mounted and pearl-handled weapons that Sam Smilax had deftly removed from under Mr. Falkner's coat-tails and the silver-trimmed derringer that had been reposing snugly in the right-hand waistcoat-pocket. Black Allen was performing a similar service in the case of the younger members of the trio, getting two guns from the drowsy-eyed Willie the Lush, and one from the thoroughly scared and white-to-the-gills literary member of the syndicate.

During this frisking process, Jim Falkner trembled with rage and fairly gnashed his teeth, but that menacing young cannon and the giant figure of the man who wielded it proved a sufficient check upon his savage impulses.

Joel Triggs was a new animal in the zoo of his large experience, and the most compelling animal that had ever got the whip-hand of him. There was no chance here for his physical strength and reckless daring, so, after the first enraging shock had passed, he swiftly resolved to fall back upon his craft and cunning.

At a smiling nod from the Texan, he dropped his arms, folded them across his chest, tilted back in his chair and composed his features into an expression of cynical amusement.

Sidney Horace Porter and Hank Benton, however, were sweating profusely, and when their arms came down they dropped limply at their sides. Their eyes had never left the hollow vindictive eye of Triggs's enormous Colt's, and the pulses of both young men were dangerously high till he dropped the gun into the pocket of his long flowing coat, swung a chair up alongside the desk and sat down, facing the chief object of the visit.

Sam Smilax and Black Allen, who had taken but a few moments to break and empty the ordnance they had collected, tossing it into a waste-basket over by the little typewriter-tables, also pulled up chairs to the right and left of the man from the Panhandle, to cover any flank movement that might be attempted in the general direction of the door. While Joel Triggs was framing his opening remark, according to preconceived plan, Jim Falkner broke the silence by turning suddenly to Black Allen and asking in a perfectly even and steady voice,

"Where did you dig up this circus-freak, Mr. Editor, and why am I chosen for the premier honor of the exhibition?"

"This gentleman," replied Black Allen curtly, ignoring the slur, "has accompanied Mr. Smilax and myself to this office, in the interest of the heirs of Mrs. Catherine Duer, late of Magnolia, Colorado, and at present buried in an unmarked grave in the Tonopah Cemetery."

THE only effect of this announcement upon the head of the United Syndicated Mines, Limited, was to cause him to dart a savage glance at Hank Benton, who had started to roll a cigarette and suddenly lost control of his hands. Willie the Lush required no such reproof, however. He was complete master of his faculties again, had crossed his knees, plunged his hands deep in his trousers' pockets and dropped his head forward, as if to proclaim that he took only a languid interest in what went forward.

"So you're still harping on that fake murder mystery of yours?" Falkner sneered back at Allen, still ignoring Joel Triggs. "If you think you've got a case, why in thunder don't you take it to the District Attorney, up in Hawthorne? If you and this fat Buffalo Bill here think you can blackmail——"

Joel Triggs lurched suddenly forward and leveled the forefinger of his right hand at the bridge of the blustering Falkner's nose.

"Stow that bluff, Jim Falkner," he said, in a voice that had a metal sting to it. "Stow it, or it'll get you to hell faster 'n

Digitized by Google

you know how to drop. It'll only take six more nasty words out of your mouth to cause me to walk across this desk of yours and break you in two, like I break this brass ruler you're trying to edge your fingers at." The ease with which the Texan's mammoth hands snapped the stout bar of metal caused a new light to leap into Jim Falkner's eyes, and he came about abruptly on a different tack.

"Have you any personal interest in this—er—this unidentified woman—that is, any legal interest?" he asked, quickly, addressing the Texan squarely in a businesslike voice.

Triggs tossed the pieces of broken ruler into a scrap-basket and settled back into his chair. He paused for a moment before replying. It required all his will-power to restrain the impulse to lay violent hands upon the man he estimated as the lowest type of scoundrel extant.

"I have only the interest," he said at last, "that any decent man has in running home a cowardly crime to the door it belongs at."

"And you are convinced," retorted Falkner, suddenly assuming the severe, confident tone of the cross-examiner, "that this woman—whoever she was—was murdered?"

"I am," Triggs gave back, with vibrant emphasis. "I'm as sure of it as I am that you and your whole outfit are a bunch of dirty, wildcatting crooks."

"And you have legal proof of it?" asked Falkner, in the same level tones. "If you have, why don't you take it to the Public Prosecutor of Esmeralda County?"

"For the —— good and sufficient reason that I don't choose to," Triggs gave back. "I've talked this thing over with my young friends here, and we've decided that the law of club and fang will answer pat and ample in this case. The law on the statute-books was woven to tangle up justice in just such crimes as you and your ilk invent."

"So then you are going blind, and relying on the reckless conclusions of a pair of boys? I should judge that you are old and sane enough to use better judgment. If you are a decent, fair-minded man, as you say, just deal us an even hand and we'll argue this thing out on the basis of the law of club and fang, as you call it. What proof have you that *I* had anything to do with the death of that woman, or that I ever had any dealings with her? Fire away—I'll answer any questions you put and answer them right off the bat."

As he said this, Falkner turned his head slightly and glanced at the big gilded clock which ornamented one of the side walls.

"Oh, we'll give you a show for your little white alley," snorted Triggs, reaching into the inside pocket of his coat and bringing out a stout envelope. "I've a letter here, written to my friend Sam Smilax, from his little pal and partner, Remsen Halliday Leaf—ever hear of him, Mr. Falkner?"

Beyond a sudden widening of the eyes, the black-bearded hole-in-the-ground promoter did not flinch.

"Yes, I think I have," he replied slowly, "though I can't think now in what connection. Hardware-pedler or something like that, wasn't he?"

"Never mind what he was," snorted Triggs. "At present he happens to be a .44-caliber *man*, and this letter of his will interest you and give you all the opportunity in the world to answer questions."

"By all means let me hear it then," said Falkner, with just the trace of a sneer in his voice.

CHAPTER XII

THE HOUSEHOLD OF MAGNOLIA

THE Texan drew several folded sheets from the envelope and returned it to his pocket. Before he began to read, he glanced swiftly about the room to see just how the land lay with Black Allen and Sam Smilax and the two men they were mounting guard over, warily taking note of every expression and every move of Falkner's. Even as he read, Joel Triggs did not surrender more than half his gaze to the letter. At the end of every sentence he covered his man with the full focus of his gaze, and was frankly amazed at the stony imperturbability of the head of the United Syndicated Mines, Limited.

"I reckon you'll be able to guess the date of the letter from the contents and from certain facts stored up in your mind," he began, "so here goes the letter itself:

MY DEAR SAM:

You probably got word from Allen's friend in Reno that Pink Reagan and yours truly hit the Overland trail for the village of Omaha, to there meet and confer with a certain young lady—Miss Marjory Duer of Magnolia, Colorado.

We found Miss Duer in great distress of mind.

Digitized by Google

The telegram she'd got from Reno led her to believe that harm had befallen her mother in some mysterious fashion, notwithstanding the telegram had been signed, *Mother*.

I never want a job like this again, Sam, though it has made me acquainted with as sweet and charming a miss as I ever hope to meet in this world. She has pluck, too, and an unlimited supply, as she found opportunity to demonstrate thirty-six hours after our arrival here, when Messrs. Rent, Wilkes and Brooks walked in on us in the little Bedford Hotel on the outskirts of the town.

Of course, it was our plant, but wait—I'd better present the facts in their proper order.

Joel Triggs thought he detected a sudden squirm of Jim Falkner's eyes, but that was all. Had he glanced to one side, he would have seen an unmistakable symptom of alarmed interest in Willie the Lush. He continued:

But to leave those slimy mates of Skipper Falkner's grand-larceny-and-murder crew to the last, I will set down in brief the story Miss Duer told us as soon as she could recover from the shock of the news we brought her and which she guessed the moment she laid eyes on us.

Her mother—Mrs. Catherine Duer—was widowed about thirteen months ago. The girl herself is only seventeen and the mother was only thirty-five. Neither of them knew anything more about the world and the poisonous reptiles crawling in it than a couple of children.

When Peter Whitney Duer died, he left his widow $10,000 in life-insurance and a quit-claim deed on big piece of land outside of Bakersfield, California. Duer had homesteaded this land twenty years ago with a man named Hawkes—Daniel Hawkes.

Hawkes had taken out the land in his name. They were good pals and Duer trusted him. Later, he loaned Hawkes a few hundred dollars and Hawkes ultimately paid the loan by handing over a quit-claim deed to that Bakersfield land. This deed, so far as Miss Duer knows, was never recorded.

Fifteen years ago, Duer came east to Colorado to live and set up a home for his wife and two-year-old baby.

He'd failed forty-seven ways as a pioneer land-breaker and fell back on his trade of schoolmaster, teaching here and there in Colorado until he settled down in Magnolia and was made head of the schools in that district. Things were just beginning to shape for him when he died.

Now all this time, Sam, that quit-claim deed was lying at the bottom of an old trunk. Hawkes, the maker, was dead and Duer had estimated that the land was worth about $7 in wooden money, basing his estimate on the experience he and Hawkes had had in trying to raise wheat on the black alkali. Anyway, he never got any inquiries about the land or offers to buy it.

It was only a little while after the widow had been paid her insurance money when along came a smooth blond-haired person named Hawkins with the voice and face of an angel. He asks the widow if she'd ever been in Bakersfield and if her husband had owned any land there.

The widow had been there, but that was many years ago. Her husband, as she recalled, had worked some land there with a man named Hawkes, and their crops and everything else failed. She dimly remembered that her husband had had some kind of a deed that he regarded as a good deal of a joke. She thought it might be among her papers.

The Hawkins person asked her to hunt for the deed. He hinted that it might be worth a few hundred dollars to her. She looked through all her husband's papers, but could not find it. That velvet-voiced blond gentleman was sorry, but he didn't go away.

No, he stuck round and fell to talking rainbow gold. He talked so beautifully he talked the little widow out of her $10,000 insurance money, leaving her a gilt-and-yellow engraving of the Lone Star Extension Mine, said engraving signed by one J. B. Falkner——

Joel Triggs looked up sharply, but J. B. Falkner gave no sign. Triggs read on:

The widow had been promised a flood of dividends. Six months passed and not a postage-stamp. She began to write. No replies.

Then, about eight months after she had bought the stock, she stumbled on that quit-claim deed in the bottom of an old trunk. She remembered what the blond person had said about it and wrote to him that she had found it, addressing her letter care of the Lone Star Extension Mine, Tonopah, Nevada.

This time she got an answer by return-mail, letter signed, *Joseph Perry Hawkins*. Hawkins requested her to come to Salt Lake City to meet him.

He'd give her $25,000 for the deed, and all expenses paid; also her mining-stock would be turned back into money. She was to be sure, though—and mark this, Sam—to bring the letter in which all these glittering promises were made.

Joy came back to that little Magnolia household in one grand splash. That pair of kids—mother and daughter, poor babes in the woods was all they were—hugged each other and danced all over the cottage.

Then the widow began to make frantic preparations for her journey, and in the course of the excitement she mixed up the quit-claim deed with an instalment mortgage, and when she left home she had the instalment mortgage in the envelope which ought to have carried the deed.

Now, that's all this poor child here knows, Sam.

Her mother just dropped out of sight as if the ground had opened and swallowed her. She was to have wired from Salt Lake City, but there was no wire, no letter—nothing.

There is one thing more, though, before I go on with my report of other developments here of a personal character—the clothing worn by Mrs. Catherine Duer when she left Magnolia was identically the same as the clothing worn by the young woman who was——

The white light of afternoon had suddenly streaked with gray and the shadows were thickening by the minute. The Texan paused abruptly in his reading and said over his shoulder to Black Allen:

Digitized by Google

"You'd better switch on these lights. We can't take any chances with this vermin in the dark."

As he swung his glance back to Falkner, he noticed that his teeth were gleaming and his bearded lips wore a cynical smile.

The electric bulbs blazed, and the smile became more pronounced.

"So this amuses you, does it?" challenged Triggs, unable to control his emotions, as he folded the letter and stuck it back into his pocket.

"It did strike me as sort of funny in spots," returned the other, sneeringly, "but I wasn't smiling at that. No, it was something else—something I heard. Something I hear. *Quick, Joe! Rush the door!*"

CHAPTER XIII

STRAIGHT-FLUSH HAWKINS

JIM FALKNER'S voice came ringing up from a whisper, and he got to his feet with a cat-like spring, hurling the big mahogany desk over on Joel Triggs with a sudden tremendous heave. Almost in the same motion he flung his chair at Black Allen as that agile young man jumped to his feet, hardware in hand.

Allen went down in a heap with the impact, and his guns were jarred from his grip.

Nor did the customarily alert and lightning-swift Sam Smilax fare any better than his friends.

The possum-playing Willie the Lush had got his signals one jump ahead, dived at Sam's legs the moment he began to rise and smeared him on the floor with something in the nature of a flying tackle.

Before any of the victims of this smashing onslaught fairly sensed what had happened, the door burst open and three armed men streamed in.

Titan of strength though he was, that crushing mass of mahogany desk had smitten Joel Triggs sorely, pounded the wind out of him and slightly stunned him.

As he heaved the desk off his chest and struggled to his feet with a bellow of rage, his first clear vision focused upon the muzzle of his own Baby Six, gripped in the capable fist of Jim Falkner, and upon a tall fair-haired man who covered him with two more long stems of blue metal.

It was more or less of an automatic impulse that stopped the Texan from inviting instant death and urged him to play the game with a wholesome regard for the certainties of annihilation contained in his own pet ordnance.

Joel Triggs thought rapidly, and his quick eyes got the whole picture within range with one snap of his optical lenses.

A thick-set, square-faced man with a white mustache and coal-black hair was standing over Sam Smilax with a sufficiency of shooting-tools, while another similarly equipped strong-arm individual was calming the passions of Black Allen and cursing the timorous and unnerved Hank Benton for his slowness in gathering up the editor's guns from the floor. Willie the Lush, who had annexed Sam's .38's, was busying himself barricading the door.

Acting upon the softly spoken yet nevertheless incisive command of the fair-haired newcomer, Triggs, Smilax and Allen were backed against the wall and compelled to sit down side by side in three chairs. The desk was turned back upon its casters, and Hank Benton was posted at one of the windows.

This done, the thick-set square-faced man and the loose-jointed, pock-marked subduer of Editor Allen were instructed to "keep the enemy covered." The fair-haired stranger gave this order with a really beautiful smile, tucked his own artillery back into the pockets of his jacket, nodded to Jim Falkner to do the same with his cannon and then said jauntily,

"What's all this lovely party about, Jim?"

"Oh, that little matter I wrote you about, Joe. It's mighty lucky you got in from Hawthorne when you did, for that big cow-herder from Texas might have gone Berserker and mussed me up. He's a regular raging Samson, and these kids have conned him into the belief that we had something to do with the death of the woman whose body was found out back of Jack's dance-hall."

"Conned, hell!" blazed Black Allen, gripping the arms of his chair to hold himself in. "There was only one link of a complete chain missing, and Mr. Straight-Flush Joseph Hawkins has brought that in on his finger."

The sunny smile wiped off the fair-haired Hawkins's countenance, and he plunged his right hand into his pocket.

Digitized by Google

His blue eyes blazed with lambent flames as he turned on Jim Falkner and asked,

"How far has this thing gone? You wrote they were only guessing. Did they bluff you——"

"Bluff nothing," snarled Falkner. "Rent and Wilkes fell down all along the line, and these amateur sleuths have got the history of Catherine Duer from her birth. Just fish the letter out of that big whale's pocket and read it for yourself. If you'd only stuck around as I advised, this wouldn't have happened."

Hawkins bit his lip for a moment, and then leveled his eyes at Joel Triggs.

"Kindly toss over that letter, Mr. Falkner refers to," he said, slowly.

Joel Triggs responded by buttoning his coat and folding his arms across his chest.

"Not this evening, you doll-faced coward and worse," retorted Triggs. "The only way you'll get this letter is by robbing a corpse. Yes, and you'll find this is a different kind of corpse to rob from the usual sort you meet in your business, Chinese rings or no Chinese rings."

JIM FALKNER was leaning back against the desk, with his fist on the hilt of Triggs's Baby Six, which protruded from his coat-pocket. His glance traveled swiftly from the face of Hawkins to the three men under the guns and back again to Hawkins.

The latter stood to the right of Falkner, with one foot flung up over the back of a chair. His handsome, womanish face was contorted in a frown, but in the glacial blue eyes there was no scrutable revelation.

"A newspaperman, a faro-dealer and a freak," he said suddenly, with a light laugh. "You ought to stick to faro-dealing, Samuel Smilax, for that cast-iron mug of yours is a wonder. Speedy Thurston loved you like a son, and it'll be a sad blow to him to learn that you've descended into the cheap rôle of private detective."

"Oh, Samuel owns a mine over in Stillwater and is playing angel to this grafting quill-driver," cut in Falkner. "I guess they've all got their price, Joe, but before we talk terms, we'd better read the letter. He'd read about half to me—the man-mountain—and had just broken off at an interesting point when you came along."

"Some of you come and take the letter," taunted Triggs. "I'd just like to get one of you two between me and some of these guns. I'd prefer Mr. Hawkins to step over, but he doesn't seem as anxious to as he was on that night in this office when he came into Tonopah togged up as a woman, and murdered Mrs. Catherine Duer for a quit-claim deed to a million-dollar Bakersfield oil-gusher he'd got a bum title to from the Hawkes heirs. That deed he didn't get is also tucked away in this breast-pocket of mine. I may not sit quite as gentle as that poor little woman did when you stepped up to her and jabbed her with that ring of Wan Yup's tong, but I'd mighty like to have you make the experiment."

The scowl deepened on the fair brow of Straight-Flush Hawkins, and again he turned a savage, accusing glance on Falkner. Changes were also wrought in the countenances of the two men who covered the Texan, Sam Smilax and Black Allen, changes which suddenly revealed to the three friends and allies that while these aides of Hawkins might be used to bar-room, or poker-room, gun-fighting, cold-blooded murder was not in their line. The strain of keeping their eyes fixed on the three men before them, and their inability to study the faces of Hawkins and Falkner, were beginning to tell on them.

Falkner met the accusing glance in Hawkins's eyes with a regard equally savage, and said, under his breath,

"Don't be a —— fool, Joe, they're only guessing. They haven't got a line of legal evidence. If you're afraid of anything, why don't you tell Snow and Pike to let their guns go off accidental?"

This wasn't said so low but that it carried to the ears of Snow and Pike.

Sam Smilax's acute ears also heard, and he concentrated his gaze upon the white-mustached and black-haired Snow, whose features underwent a sudden spasm. Sam read in a flash that his nerve was going on the rocks. Shifting his regard to Straight-Flush Hawkins, he saw that desperate gentleman's eyes tighten and the muscles of his right arm stiffen as his hand slid into his jacket-pocket.

There was barely an instant's interval between Falkner's whispered suggestion and the rapid-fire exclamation from Hawkins,

"It's worth a hundred thousand apiece, for Snow and Pike and fifty thousand each for Willie the Lush and Benton, if the big

Digitized by Google

beef has got that deed. It'll be six live witnesses against three——"

HE DIDN'T finish the sentence, and his coat-pocket spat flame and smoke in the direction of Joel Triggs, who for several moments had been getting his mighty muscles in tension for a desperate rush.

Triggs, as well as Sam Smilax and Black Allen, had sensed intuitively that Snow and Pike had hypnotized themselves with their own indecision and that their mental processes were in a state of blur. They also saw that Hawkins had begun to realize this and was prepared to begin the slaughter himself and thereby compel his two sentries to join in the cannonading.

Triggs wasn't one jump ahead of Sam Smilax, when he catapulted from his chair and drove his bulk at Hawkins. Two bullets tore the flesh of the Texan's thigh as he charged his man, and the fair-haired and nimble Hawkins danced to one-side with the swiftness of a shifting shadow. He dodged a head-on collision, but failed to duck a trip-hammer fist, which impinged against his shoulder and spun him off his feet.

Jim Falkner shot squarely at the on-rushing Sam Smilax with Triggs's forty-eight-ounce Colt, but he wasn't prepared for the kick of the Baby Six, and the bullet missed Sam a foot and shattered the gun-arm of Snow, causing him to drop both his weapons and bellow his agony. Pike had backed away from Black Allen, working both triggers of his guns with panicky aim. As Allen closed in on him, he struck blindly with one pistol-barrel and then went down, gasping for breath, feeling as if his wind-pipe and throat were in the clutch of steel bands.

Willie the Lush looked on at the battle supinely, frozen with fear and uncertainty, unable even to compel himself to tear open the door and flee. With the characteristically nerveless Benton, the impulse to duck was stronger, and he plunged out of the window and went streaking across the sage-brush flats in the general direction of nowhere.

Hammered off his balance by that glancing blow of the mammoth Texan's fist, Straight-Flush Hawkins proved that even a man who was coward enough to slay a defenseless woman with a poisoned ring could combat for his life with every ounce of energy in a powerful body. He clung to his guns, too, and kept shooting up at the Texan as he rolled over on the floor and squirmed up on his feet. There were two bullets in Triggs's right arm as he rushed in for the second punch, and one bullet gashed his scalp as he delivered the blow.

This time he landed squarely with two hundred and eighty pounds of murderous energy, then was able to turn his attention to Jim Falkner, who had managed to pin Sam Smilax on the floor and was reaching out a hand to seize the Baby Six, which had fallen a few feet from where he went down in Sam's embrace.

The man from the Panhandle fairly plucked the hefty and powerful Falkner from the floor and shook Sam Smilax out of his grasp.

What followed was primal and terrific, the working out of that law of club and fang Triggs had referred to early in his discourse.

CHAPTER XIV

CLUB-LAW

A BEDRAGGLED, dust-caked and hollow-eyed young man stood in the doorway of the *Tonopah Sun* office and waited for Editor Allen to raise his head from the pile of papers heaped up on his desk. He was such a pitiable object that Chaw merely blinked one drowsy eye at him and continued his matutinal slumbers.

When Black Allen glanced up he had to strain his gaze to make out the visitor's identity, but when he made it out he started up from his chair and cried,

"Hank Benton, thank Heaven! You're just the man I've been hoping against hope would turn up."

Allen pulled up a chair close to his own and invited the ghastly visaged visitor to occupy it. Benton tottered in and dropped limply as if he were an inanimate bundle, and he sat as he slumped down, too weak to hold himself squarely in his seat.

Jimmy Silk came a-running with potent stimulants, which restored the wreck to some semblance of animation. He started to speak, and brought on a paroxysm of coughing.

"It's the cursed alkali dust," he presently

Digitized by Google

managed to gasp. "Another day and—— But I'm here; came on in to face the music. Hadn't the guts to die out there under a joshua-tree. I don't know what you've got on me, or what became of the others. I sneaked back in time to see Hawkins and Falkner going out on shutters. I saw you and Smilax talking to Sandstorm Smith, and Willie the Lush standing by, looking like he'd seen forty ghosts. That was enough, and I thought I'd try the long hike for Round Mountain. 'Twas too long and the trail blurred—so I'm back.

"I guess you know how far I was in on that hellish job, but I swear by every decent ideal I've left behind I was only a poor blind tool, dragged in by the heels, as an accessory before the fact. I'm not going to whimper, and what's left of me is willing to take its medicine. Let the music begin—I feel like a dirge."

"I RECKON the music's over, Hank," said Black Allen slowly. "I've known all along you were only playing the weak-sister parts for Falkner and Hawkins, though how a man of your talents could train with that gang got me, till I wrenched out of Porter that they'd framed you for forging postal money-orders, and could pull the drop for you on a moment's notice. We got Willie the Lush's version of the part you played in luring Mrs. Catherine Duer to the Desert, and Mr. Triggs, our big friend from Texas, got some mumblings from what there remains of Hawkins and Falkner. They——"

"They're alive!" ejaculated Benton, a shudder running through his body and his eyes dilating with fear.

"Yes," responded Black Allen grimly, "but in a way not pleasant to discuss. If they continue to improve, they may eke out the remainder of their days in a cripples' hospital. Their punishment is pretty horrible, but Providence seemed to direct it that way and we are not finding any fault with Providence. Now, let me hear your side of it."

It was a struggle to control his faculties and command his voice, but at last Benton managed to respond,

"There really isn't very much to tell on my side of it. Hawkins sent me to Salt Lake City to meet Mrs. Duer and bring her on to Tonopah. I didn't know his game then, but later I learned he'd planned the murder deliberate'. He wanted to get hold of and destroy that quit-claim deed. He figured that if he put the rightful owner of the deed, who was the only person who knew any of the facts of its existence, out of the way, it would make a clean job of it and clear his titles. You see, after Mrs. Duer had hunted for that deed and been unable to find it, he went ahead and bought out the Hawkes heirs, paying them some considerable good money, though not on a basis of more than about two cents for a dollar of value. That quit-claim was worth pretty close to a million to him."

"And he made that appointment in Salt Lake City so as to throw the relatives of Mrs. Duer off the track?" interposed Black Allen, eagerly. "How was it that she did not write or telegraph to her daughter?"

Allen was watching his visitor intently and saw his features writhe with a spasm that was not due to any mere physical agony.

"That was my part of it," Benton replied huskily. "I should have begun to suspect, but I swear I never thought he'd go so far. I destroyed the letter and telegrams.

"When we got to Reno, Hawkins and Willie the Lush were there. Hawkins was disguised as a woman—he was one of the two blondes in Willie the Lush's party. The other one was—well, a blonde. Hawkins's blonde, to be exact. You see, Hawkins wanted to get down to Tonopah unrecognized and to leave unrecognized after, after——"

Another fit of coughing racked the young man, but Allen urged him on,

"Didn't Mrs. Duer ride in that Pullman, too?"

"No," Benton replied, with another contortion of his haggard features. "That was more of my part in it. Hawkins had bought up all the Pullman accommodations, and Willie the Lush passed them out among his friends who were going down into the desert. So we—Mrs. Duer and myself—rode in the day-coach. I left the train at Mina, telling her that she was to go direct to the offices of the United Syndicated Mines, Limited, immediately she got off the train. She could see the Arcade's electric sign from the station-platform, and in the jam of people on the platform it was fairly certain that any one getting down from a day-coach would

Digitized by Google

not be recognized. It all worked out just that way, as you know. I think that is about all——"

"Just one thing more," Black Allen demanded. "How is it Hawkins went to the length of murder when his victim had failed to bring with her the quit-claim deed he wanted?"

"That was his one false step," answered Benton. "He did not discover until after he had chopped that ring against his victim's temple that she had failed to bring the deed. She didn't know it herself, for she sealed the envelope in which she had put the instalment mortgage by mistake. I heard afterward that when Hawkins made the discovery he went Berserker, and if I'd been by he'd probably have added me to his list.

"He couldn't afford to wait round for me to get down from Mina, though, so he hustled back to Bakersfield to get all his outfit down there together for a desperate defense in case the daughter began an action on the deed, leaving Falkner and Willie the Lush here to cover up the murder. He sent on Rent, Wilkes and Brooks to help out, which brings me to a point where I'd like to ask a question, Allen. What happened to them over in Omaha? The big man from Texas never finished reading the letter."

"Well, they were taken care of, too," said Allen, quietly. "They ran into a neat little ambush prepared by Mr. R. H. Leaf and Mr. P. N. K. Reagan, and are now resting easily in the prison-hospital in the Nebraska metropolis. On their way to Omaha, after the train had left Ogden, Utah—and Rent, Wilkes and Brooks were on their way to Magnolia, Colorado, via Salt Lake City and Denver—Leaf and Reagan met a pair of post-office inspectors who had been on the trail of that trio of vultures for six years.

"It was nicely arranged for the Government men that their long futile search should be rewarded. Miss Duer sent a telegram to her home, stating simply that any person who called for her on urgent business could find her in a certain little hotel in Omaha. This telegram met Messrs. Rent, Wilkes and Brooks at the door, as it were. Those canny gentlemen swallowed the bait, hook, line and sinker, and thirty-six hours later walked in on a reception committee of four and got a pretty nasty taste of the Single O. McGinty Automatic which R. H. Leaf was at one time engaged in putting on the market.

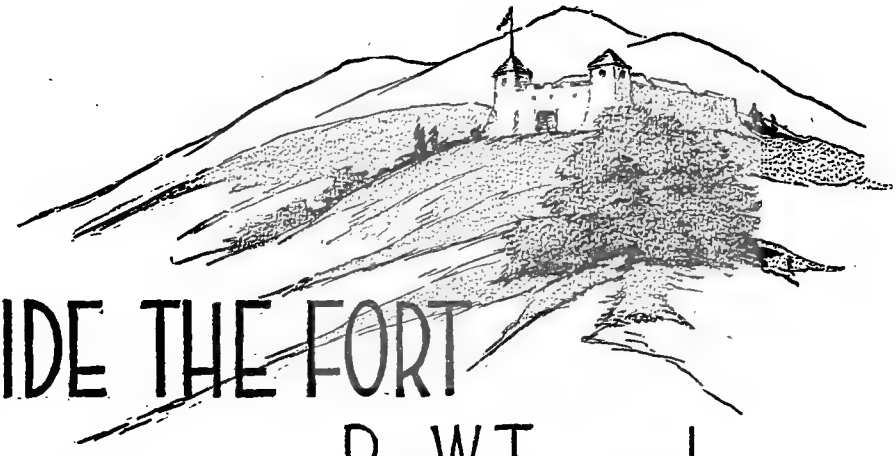
"Oh, yes, they were game, you may say, but it availed them naught, and while convalescing they must ponder on what the United States District Court will do with some forty-odd indictments that have been piling up against them.

"IT HAS seemed in this case, Hank Benton, that the law of club and fang has certainly served where the law of the land, as expressed in divers millions of words, might have failed utterly. Much of the evidence we obtained would probably never have gotten on the record. but with the aid of our capable friend, Mr. Joel Triggs of the Panhandle, that sometimes blind and fickle gentleman, old Dr. Retribution, has been clubbed into line and been forced to administer to the patients one of his most potent prescriptions. I only hope that your little dose may have a salutary effect."

"Amen," sighed Benton, dropping his chin on his breast, and in another moment he had surrendered to the fatigue and exhaustion of six days in the alkali wilderness and passed off into deep coma. He was soon added as a patient to Doc Stubbs's bungalow hospital, where Joel Triggs came every day for a new dressing for his gunshot-wounds, and where Whiskers Burgess had apparently been entirely cured of the booze-hanker.

Sam Smilax had gone on to Denver at the urgent request of Rem Leaf, who wrote that he was desperately wounded in a most delightful manner, and that there wasn't one chance in a thousand of his recovery.

Digitized by Google



INSIDE THE FORT

By W. Townend

THE trouble began when they were both juniors in the Upper Third. Only in the lower forms of a big public school can one show one's real feelings. Afterward, appearances have to be maintained, the traditions of centuries respected, and things are different.

It was Fortescue's fault, of course. Kendal, being a plodder, asked for nothing more than to be allowed to work unmolested. Fortescue, who was clever, mimicked his stutter, spilled ink on his books and gave him nicknames such as only a schoolboy may use. At first Kendal took no notice. Then, being heavy of fist, he retaliated with much success. This made matters worse.

They were not in the same boarding-house, or they might have become better friends, and they went up the school together, rivals in everything.

They moved into the Army Class in the same term and sat near each other for the following three years.

Kendal was given his football cap two whole seasons before Fortescue scraped into the fifteen. Fortescue was higher up in the cricket eleven, being a brilliant hitter and a tear-away fast bowler. Kendal was only a steady bat, ugly to watch, but safe when wickets were falling.

Fortescue kept his place at the top of the form by sheer brilliancy, and without apparent effort. But Kendal, in order to avoid disaster on the morrow, would spend long hours over his books by candle-light, after the gas had been turned out and all self-respecting people were asleep.

Everybody knew that Fortescue would pass into Sandhurst with the utmost ease, but as regards Kendal there was some doubt. His form-master, correcting the Latin proses essential to a career in the British Army, would shake his head doubtfully.

During the Summer holidays the lists were published, and Fortescue received the greatest shock of his life. He had passed, naturally, and high up, as he had expected, but—Kendal, the despised, was three places ahead of him.

At Sandhurst they were both in the same company, and met continually, though they avoided each other as much as possible.

Kendal still plodded. Fortescue still scoffed at him behind his back. In their last term Kendal played in the fifteen and helped to win the Woolwich match, but Fortescue was passed over in favor of a junior from Clifton.

On the whole, Sandhurst did not improve their relations, and both were heartily glad when the time came for them to depart to India, in the old *Himalaya* of pious memory.

During the next five years they continually ran across each other.

Whenever they met, Kendal would greet Fortescue stolidly, "How are you, Fortescue? Quite fit, I hope!"

And the other, smiling effusively, would

Digitized by Google

answer, "My dear old chap, I'm delighted to see you!"

This was typical of them both.

They went home on leave by the same P. & O. and separated at Plymouth.

As if in mockery, Fate brought them together again in a large country house, with a crowd of people. Here Fortescue shone—he was always a favorite with women—and enjoyed himself thoroughly. Kendal did not. In fact, he left hurriedly after a few days, with no other explanation than that of the time-honored sudden telegram calling him up to town.

When his year's leave was up he returned to his regiment gladly, and his mess found him changed. He seemed older, graver, more subdued and silent.

Then the regiment moved up to the North-west Frontier, and was split up into small detachments, patroling the roads, ready for what might come at any moment—lonely work at the best and, as such, welcomed by Kendal. A year later he discovered that Fortescue was also on the Frontier.

All this is by way of preface.

II

THE tribe had been restive for six months and more. Given the opportunity, anything may happen on the Border—a dreary wilderness of mountains and snow, where some one is always ready for a Holy War against the British, if only as a truce to a too-pressing blood-feud.

There had been some slight bother over the succession and, as a natural consequence, much bloodshed. The old king died suddenly—which is how people often die up on the Border—and one of his younger sons seized the throne, also, what was more important, the treasury. The British Agent, representative of the suzerainty of the Supreme Power, was insulted. The rightful heir fled, knowing his life was forfeit. An uncle, scenting blood, came snuffling down from his hill fortress with his army.

A priest raved wildly, and men listened, handling their rifles lovingly. Thus arose the opportunity—and then followed the rising.

The killing came sooner than the Politicals, in their wisdom, had expected. This last was due to a half-brother, who who was playing a deep game.

So the wires flashed messages, isolated posts were recalled in haste and men moved heaven and earth to be sent up while there was yet time.

MUCH against his will, and only because the Sepoys could not have lasted another half-day's march, Heath was forced to occupy the little old fort. Otherwise the column would have been butchered wholesale in the pass.

Even behind the tumble-down walls, the end seemed just as certain. The fort was very, very old and very dilapidated; a grim-looking place, with two square corner towers, battered parapets, a jumble of flat-roofed buildings and courtyards.

Once it had been formidable, a place of many sieges. But that was long before the days of the Lee-Metford Mark II, with its ten cartridges, or the Martini-Henry, or the Snider or even Brown Bess. It had been at its best, perhaps, when Marlborough was fighting in the Low Countries. It was situated on the very edge of the steep river-bank, about eight hundred yards from the village, built with walls of rough-hewn timber placed horizontally between stone and mortar. There was a garden on one side, grass-grown, surrounded by a wall, dotted with trees; a small orchard and, beyond that, a polo-ground. And round about were the great, towering, snow-capped hills—north, south, east and west.

Heath, weak and shaken with dysentery, carried in a doolee, had put no faith in the smiling politeness of the head-men. He had served too long among the Pathans to be mistaken in the portents. But the ammunition was needed on the other side of the hills, so, muffled in sheepskins, their eyes protected against the glare by blue goggles, their feet wrapped in blanket-strips, the troops staggered on in single file through the deep snow of the pass, twelve thousand feet up, and on down into the valley, along the river-bank; footsore, frost-bitten and weary, stupid from lack of sleep.

One gray dawn before the day's march began, a travel-stained, frightened messenger reached the small column, bearing a letter from the British Agent, together with his own personal information that the road was blocked and that a large force was waiting in the defile higher up. Heath looked at his exhausted Sepoys huddled

Digitized by Google

around the greenwood fires and laughed grimly. He wondered how soon the finish would come, were they to be caught in the open.

Kendal lounged up out of the gloom; a tall, gaunt figure in a thick sheepskin poshteen, dirty khaki and an old helmet.

"Kendal," said Heath, "they've got us. The fighting's started, and we must make our own arrangements. Read this!"

"H'm! We've walked right into it, eh?" said Kendal, looking up from the crumpled sheet of paper.

"Yes. Wish I wasn't such an infernal wreck. Thought we'd have a job to get through when we left. Better go and tell Fortescue. Help him shake some life into those people of his, will you!" Kendal turned away. "And I say, Kendal, we mustn't let the villagers see we know they're out, and I think—yes, I think we'd better get inside the fort at once."

KENDAL took out a dozen Sikhs to reconnoiter the rough ground nearer the village. The small party was fired on from the crest of a high cliff, one man being killed and another wounded.

So they advanced no farther, but took possession of the ruined fort.

The rain poured down steadily as the tired, shivering soldiers and coolies marched in, laden with stores and Snider and Martini ammunition-boxes, also carrying some ten invalids in doolees. There was much to be done, and they worked hard, even Heath, tortured and racked by his illness.

Fortescue was sent out with a body of men along the river-bank, sentries were posted, ranges measured, head-cover raised on the parapets, loopholes made, outlying buildings pulled down and the heavy timber used for patching up the walls, supported by earthworks. A well was discovered in one of the courtyards, easing Heath's mind of its chief anxiety. A large room was set aside as a hospital, in the charge of the panic-stricken Hindoo apothecary, who was given over to the frankest of fear.

During the morning a deputation of head-men and village elders arrived and protested indignantly, with much Oriental speciousness, against the fort being occupied. Heath interviewed them on the rough ground near the orchard. They demanded that the troops should depart forthwith, either the same way as they had come or forward, it was no concern of theirs. It would be bad for the district, their stopping. Baggage-porters would be provided willingly—more than willingly—to the number of one hundred. There was no war, no thought of it. There had been no firing from the village. A few shots in the early morning, perhaps; doubtless the work of some irresponsible stranger. Why should their village be treated thus? It would, perhaps, not be possible to hold back their men later on.

And the spokesman, a little man, hook-nosed and full-bearded, in a gray overcoat and turban, looked inquiringly at Heath.

Heath, white with pain, wrapped in his sheepskin and blankets, answered politely, regretting his action, temporized and apologized. From behind came the noise of spades and picks, the falling of stones and battering of brickwork.

All he wanted was a day's rest. Touching the matter of coolies and supplies—also, a man had been killed——

And, with nothing settled, the deputation departed.

Later, Fortescue returned with the news that large bodies of men were coming down from the hills, and that he had been fired on.

III

THUS began the siege; with none of the pomp and circumstance of war; no search-lights flashing messages on the clouds to a relieving force, no machine-guns, no batteries, no war correspondents to chronicle brave deeds; merely a little gray fort, held by a handful of tired men.

Heath had with him a hundred and twenty Sikhs, sixty Dogras, some frightened baggage-porters, useless for fighting, and a few servants; also, Kendal and Fortescue.

The rain ceased, and night fell, cold and clear. Had the Pathans attacked, they would have captured the fort. As it was, they fired volleys at long range, unsteadily and without result, the while building sangas of stones and timber. Also, they quarreled among themselves, being Pathans and suspicious.

Heath, refusing to lie down, stumbled from group to group, encouraging the Sepoys in their work, visiting the sentries, chatting to Fortescue and Kendal, advising

Digitized by Google

and criticizing. There was no sleep that night in the fort, save when a man dropped helpless from fatigue, too tired to heed the curses of his fellows staggering over him with heavy burdens.

Kendal kept watch behind a high, loop-holed parapet, armed with a Martini.

As he gazed weary-eyed into the blackness, listening intently for any sound of sudden footsteps, his thoughts wandered.

He asked himself, with a quaint irritation, why, of all men in the world, he and Fortescue should be shut up together in a small mud fort, destined to fight for their lives against overwhelming odds, most probably doomed to die side by side. The old schoolboy dread of Fortescue, his sneers, his smiles, his ready tongue, returned after many years. Kendal knew, hide it as he might, that he could have welcomed the siege, famine, torture, wounds, disease, death, everything, but for Fortescue.

Peering down into the dimly lit courtyard, Kendal saw Heath seated on a box, talking to his old, gray-bearded Subahdar. Kendal's tired frown cleared. He had forgotten Heath. That made all the difference, of course. He yawned and began to pace to and fro, stiff with fatigue and cold.

Toward break of day, the sentries on the walls challenged loudly and fired.

The Sikhs were shaken into wakefulness, ready for what might come. Rifles were loaded, bayonets fixed. Then followed tumultuous volleys from the trees, with a bugle-call and wild yells.

"At three hundred! Ready—present—fire!" And the Sikhs' answer crashed back.

The attack died away as suddenly as it had arisen and the "Cease Fire" sounded.

It was dawn now, and the sky was pink over the hills on the other side of the river. Kendal slouched into the large courtyard, yawning.

"I'll turn in, I think," said Heath slowly. "I'm about done. Can't last out much longer."

He stood up, shakily. Out of the silence came the faint *whop* of a Snider, a last chance shot, at long range. Heath leaned against a post of the veranda, then slid down quietly, coughing. His Sikh orderly bent over him and lifted him up. Kendal, all his weariness driven away, knelt by his side.

"Are you hit, old chap?" A red stain smeared his fingers.

"'Fraid I'm—d-done." Heath smiled. "N-no good," he muttered, "d-don't trouble!" He closed his eyes. "Sit tight, won't you?"

They waited a moment, then the tall Sikh looked up and shook his head, and Kendal realized that Heath had left them. He felt sick and dazed.

They bore the frail, worn-out body into the shelter of a room, and Fortescue tottered into the court from the other side, where he had been stationed.

"Oh! There you are, Kendal. I've been hunting for you all over the place. Where did you——" He paused.

"Yes?" said Kendal, dully.

"You're looking queer. What's up?"

"Heath's dead."

"Good ——! What rotten luck!"

"Yes."

They did not meet each other's eyes.

"I suppose," continued Fortescue, "that you're in command now. You happen to be slightly senior to me, I believe."

Kendal shrugged his shoulders, and closed the door of the room behind him.

"Have you—er—any orders?" said Fortescue.

"You'd better try and get some sleep," said Kendal, and moved off toward the main gate.

THEY had a flag, a small, cheap Union Jack, a shocking production, made in Germany. Originally a cushion-cover, Kendal had used it to wrap around a pair of boots, and had found it stowed away with his kit.

On the third day of the siege they hoisted it on the tower facing the village, showing through the leafless trees.

Even Fortescue welcomed it.

"It's like everything else connected with this foul hole," he said to Kendal. "But it'll do. God knows how it's going to help us, all the same."

The days passed wearily, in a never-ending monotony. Even the bullets, whispering overhead, were disregarded by the garrison.

All day long a scattered rifle-fire came from the enemy's sangas; at times, merely the random shots of some tireless sniper, changing without warning to the crash of volleys, mingled with shouts of defiance.

The Sikhs and Dogras, waiting patiently, finger on trigger, cheek against stock, failed to dislodge these marksmen, seeing nothing

Digitized by Google

more than the occasional quick flutter of dirty white behind a rock or tree-trunk.

The Pathans, in the village, equally patient, unhampered by any hide-bound notions of warfare, would remain hidden, aiming carefully from rests until a head darkened an open loophole. Then another Sepoy would be carried into the dark, evil-smelling little hospital.

The hospital filled rapidly. The drugs were few, the medical stores almost exhausted, the Hindoo apothecary dispirited and gloomy. Kendal dreaded his daily visit. The quiet, maimed figures stretched out on the floor unnerved him. It had become a place of horrors, dark and noisesome; even the smoke-holes had had to be barricaded.

When a man's nerves are at full tension, anything jars, trifles most of all. There are worse things in a siege than rifle-fire, sickness, starvation and death. There is the strain of watching through the long silence of the night, a silence which may be ended at any moment by the sudden rush of a forlorn hope. There is the repulsion of seeing the same faces day after day, of living in the same confined space.

Kendal would dream of green grass and trees, and an English Spring; red brick and white cottages; hedges in bud and a west wind blowing from the Atlantic.

Then he would open his eyes again with a start and realize where he was: a little battered fort with the sun pouring down, khaki-clad sentries pacing the walls, a coolie carrying buckets of water from the well, a subdued hum from the Sepoys' quarters, a man's voice groaning piteously in the hospital, a tiny flag flapping on a long pole, and—Fortescue talking to him, in his low-pitched voice, through which ran an undercurrent of contempt.

Kendal would clench his fists tightly to steady himself as he answered.

The little things count, occasionally.

Early one morning a bugler in the enemy's lines sounded the "Cease Fire" and a man waved a white flag from the garden wall.

Kendal, fearing treachery, shouted that the messenger was to advance by himself, and the Sepoys went to their posts, ready for a sudden rush.

The messenger was the hook-nosed, bearded head-man who had asked Heath to leave the fort.

He salaamed gravely. Then, after a short silence, during which Kendal eyed him curiously, came the usual preliminary talk touching on unimportant matters, and finally the real reason of his coming. He offered a safe conduct to the garrison wheresoever they might desire to go; a safe conduct, porters and supplies, much grain and many sheep. It was no wish of theirs that there was fighting. It had been none of their seeking. At which Kendal smiled politely.

The little man continued. There had been much slaughter elsewhere. The other garrisons had all come to terms, and there was peace in the land. The Government of India, far-seeing, had agreed to their requests, without exception. He was only an agent for others, but there was his word for it. There would be no more killing if the fort were evacuated.

And much more to the same effect.

He departed in due course, with an air of regret, grieved beyond measure, but still polite. The white flags were removed and the dreary sniping started once more.

It became difficult to move about in the daytime without being shot at. The coolies crossed the open courtyards at a shuffling run, as the bullets knocked up the dust at their feet.

The Pathans yelled wild taunts at the garrison, daring the Sepoys to come out and fight in the open, until one night a picked force of Sikhs made a sortie and bayoneted many of those working at the sangas in the orchard. The losses in the retirement, however, were heavy.

Then followed long days of inaction, with no movement from the enemy save intermittent shooting.

FOOD was running short, and the fever-stricken men in hospital died from lack of nourishment.

The old gray-bearded Subahdar grew desperate, seeing the end as clearly as did the two Englishmen.

He pointed out that the Sikhs were tired. Why should they not sally forth and die like men? Who could tell what might not happen? A bayonet charge of everybody, with the Sikhs in the front rank, might turn the tide—or might not.

The sick? He waved his hand gently. The coolies? Let them be killed like their betters. One last charge!

Digitized by Google

But Kendal shook his head. That might come later, when the food was quite gone.

A Pathan called on those who were of his faith to come out and join him. Otherwise, they would die most painfully when the day of reckoning came. A hillman escaped over the parapet and ran in the darkness to the villagers' lines.

The next forenoon, under the protection of a flag of truce, a small bundle was brought into the fort with a message from the head-men.

Kendal took the parcel, which was wrapped in dirty cloth, and untied the fastenings. Then he swore softly as two hacked-off, bleeding feet fell out.

The letter said that the head-men disapproved of deserters quite as much as the Sahibs did. Wherefore they had taken firm measures; measures that in their opinion would prevent the said deserter from ever deserting again. As a proof thereof, they——

Kendal let the paper flutter out of his hand and Fortescue laughed shakily.

"What good are we, eh? Look at our methods! I tell you, Kendal, it makes me sick. Why can't we leave 'em alone? They get along all right without us interfering. Kill each other, of course, but why the —— shouldn't they? When we fight these beggars, what happens? A few skirmishes, a lot of marching, a few towers burnt, our fellows lose their way and get cut up, as we're going to be, and the Pathans sit in the hills and laugh at us and roll down rocks. And then they come in and sue for peace like equals, while all the time you know what they're really up to, and what their womenfolk have been doing to the wounded. Then two years afterward we do it all over again.

"My —— but we're fools. You don't think so? Don't you? What do I suggest? Why, do as the Russians do! When they send out an expedition, there's nobody left, and a —— good job, too. We're feeble and futile and rotten, afraid of the papers and the back-street, stay-at-home chapel-goer. Remember Russia and the Turkomans? They don't try any games there, now. They know what a war means. We'll know it too, some day. We can't tame the Border tribes. And my ——! When Russia comes, we'll see some of the——"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, shut up, Fortescue! I'm sick and tired of hearing your voice." And Kendal walked away.

That night there was no shooting, and the garrison slept in peace.

Kendal leaned on the parapet and looked out at the huge mountains, glistening white in the moonlight against the milk-blue sky. Spring was at hand, the glorious Spring of the hills, and the night wind bore with it the scent of newly awakened earth. At home, they would be plowing. Kendal could see the gulls following the plow as it turned up the soil. The rooks would be cawing, and —— Then he wondered if they knew at home of the fort and its tiny, worn-out garrison; if the papers could spare the space to talk of them.

From the bazaar came the drone of pipes and the shuffling throb of drums. Watch-fires twinkled in the village. A man in a sanga cursed the fort and all its inmates in a high, singsong voice, and the Sikhs grinned and cuddled their Martinis.

From near at hand a wounded Pathan, left to die by himself, groaned miserably, destroying the peace of the night with his sobs. A sentry raised his rifle, but Kendal stopped him quickly.

THE Sikhs were still eager for fighting, but the other natives went about their work dispirited and listless. Few of them were fit for duty. Also, another room had been set aside for the sick and wounded.

Each day, more from habit than for any other reason, Kendal would climb to the top of the East Tower where the flag flew, and there watch the road that wound down from the pass. The road had for Kendal a strange fascination, but he had long since given up hope of relief. News of disaster had been brought in by the small hook-nosed man, who, speaking as one gentleman to another, had advised Kendal to leave the fort at once.

Fortescue had grown strangely polite, with that studied politeness that is worse than any insult. He no longer shaved, his uniform was in tatters, stained and dirty, his mustache ill-kept and ragged.

"How long have we now?" he asked.

"Three days—with luck," said Kendal. "When the last of the rice—— After that—well, you know what will happen."

"H'm. I've no particular desire to be handed over to be tortured. I sha'n't

Digitized by Google

be captured. You may be, if you like."

Kendal grunted.

"It's always the same," Fortescue went on. "When we've got guns, Lord but we're brave! We give 'em ——, don't we! Now it's different. And how we sweat for a chance to be killed! It's different—we're going to be." A bullet whanged past his head and buried itself in the mud mortar, and Fortescue staggered away slowly.

A starving man is never quite responsible for what he says or does. The brain loses power, the nerves collapse, atrophy sets in. They were starving in the fort now. Each movement had become painful, the slightest noises irritated.

Outside the bullet-pocked defenses dead men rotted in the sun, poisoning the air, and vultures quarreled over their ghastly meals.

Strange rumors crept through the garrison, whispered from man to man. They were to be assaulted that night; the enemy had large reinforcements; the Amir had taken the field; the Russians were coming; all Hindustan had risen.

A wild red sunset; storm-rack drifted from hill to hill; night fell, dark and heavy. The wind moaned from the northwest, with spattering rain-drops. Kendal shivered as he stood on the parapet. He wondered if the old Subahdar were not right, after all. Whether they went out or stopped where they were, could make no difference. They were doomed either way.

The Pathans opened fire on every side. A man was killed, and the Sepoys replied steadily.

Pine-wood torches, dipped in oil, were fixed on the walls and flickered in the breeze.

All through the long hours the rattle of musketry continued, as on many other nights, until, about two in the morning, there came an even louder outburst of firing and the swelling roar of the Pathan war-cry. Their bugler blew the "Charge," the British "Charge," and, with hoarse yells, the hillmen rushed out of the darkness into the glare of the torches.

Carrying rough ladders, they hurled themselves at the broken-down defenses near the West Tower like a wave of the sea, scattered under the fire and thundered on once more, pouring tumultuously over the wall, hacking and stabbing wildly. The Sikhs and Dogras fought till they fell, using the butt and bayonet, chanting their monotonous "Kill, kill!" as they battered and thrust at the stormers.

Kendal drew out of the press, with his sword broken at the hilt. On the other side of the fort he could hear Fortescue encouraging his men, his voice rising above the crash of the Martinis.

A man's fingers clawed at the stones on the top of the wall. Kendal waited, revolver in hand. A Sikh raised his rifle, holding it by the muzzle, and a head appeared.

"Ho! my brother," laughed the Sikh, as he struck with the butt. The Pathan's brains splashed like curds, and Kendal, sickened, turned away.

A Pathan rushed at him, waving a rifle. Kendal fired, and the man leaped into the air, shrieking, and both went down together.

Kendal shoved the dead man off his legs, and then stumbled to his feet, choking with a sudden fear.

A bright yellow light shot up, and Kendal ran forward.

"The Tower! Good God! They've set the Tower alight!"

Bareheaded, bleeding from a cut over the eye that almost blinded him, cursing in a hoarse whisper, Kendal drove the terrified coolies to work, he himself working with them, paying no heed to the fight, until they had built up an inner barricade of timber, ammunition-boxes, cases, bedding, earth, stones and doors.

Then the Tower shook, crumpled up like a fan and fell, burying Sepoys and Pathans alike in its ruins.

There was a moment's lull, a short rest from the noise, and a few piteous appeals from the smoking débris.

Kendal forced the Sikhs and Dogras, drunk with slaughter, weary from thrusting, back behind the new defenses, and the Pathans came on once more, only to be rolled back by the bayonets.

A few odd volleys from the sangas, and the fight was over.

Kendal dropped his dripping Martini, sat down on a box, and, in the gray light of a cloudy dawn, shivered as he saw the harvest of the fight. At his feet lay the old Subahdar, with his skull gaping and his teeth fixed in a dead Pathan's throat. Kendal gazed at him curiously, wondering

Digitized by Google

whether he was happy in dying as he had wished. Between the burned ruins of the Tower and the barricade, men were stretched out in stiff, unnatural attitudes. Amid the mounds of dead, the wounded groaned faintly. The Sikhs and Dogras stood or sat motionless, with tired faces and grim mouths, waiting. One man slept, breathing easily.

Kendal rose to his feet. On the East Tower the little torn flag was still flying, and he saluted it gravely.

IV

THAT evening the two Englishmen sat in the veranda of the big courtyard, talking in whispers. The day had passed quietly, but the end was at hand.

"It's all up," said Kendal. "They'll rush us to-night, as soon as it's dark. We can't stand them off again."

Fortescue had a bullet in his shoulder.

"Queer," he muttered, "you and I, shut up here as we have been."

Kendal did not answer, but plucked mechanically at a rent in his sleeve.

Fortescue rambled on,

"We'll die together to-night, you and I."

"Yes," said Kendal. "I suppose so."

"——! Kendal, if you hate me one-quarter as much as I hate you——" Fortescue broke short, scowling.

Kendal looked up, gray-faced, with bloodshot eyes, and dark brown streaks showing on his bandaged forehead.

"What the —— are you staring at me like that for?" said Fortescue. "You despise me, don't you?" With his uninjured arm he struck the ground fiercely. His eyes gleamed, his face worked with passion, as if the mask of years had dropped.

They were just two dirty, sleepy, wounded wretches, under sentence of death, yet they hated each other and quarreled bitterly.

Kendal smiled. "You're a liar, Fortescue, and always have been, but you're a brave man. I don't think you quite know what you're saying."

"Don't I? Listen! There'll be no quarter to-night for you and me. We've got to die."

"I don't mind dying."

"Don't mind! You think not—now! Listen, you poor idiot! My ——! I always thought you had no brains, Kendal, all along, ever since we were kids together. I always hated you, and never more than now. And you're going to die, feeling most wretched. You are. Like to hear?"

"Go on, and be —— to you!"

"Do you remember four Summers ago?"

"What about it?" Kendal's smile had vanished.

"When you and I were at home on leave we stopped at a certain house together, you and I. You've not forgotten that? Do you remember by any chance a girl——"

"That'll do. I don't want to hear any more."

"Listen, man; you must!"

"If it's anything important, go on. If not, dry up."

"Did you ever ask her to marry you?" Kendal got up slowly. "Sit down. I'm serious. You wanted to marry her, didn't you? Don't shake your head and pretend you didn't. I know you did. So did others. You weren't the only one."

"What the —— are you driving at?" said Kendal, very wearily, as though his tired brain had not grasped the meaning of the other's words. "What do you know or ——"

"I know a lot. Such a lot! There wasn't much of that business I didn't know. Kendal, you were blind, man. Couldn't you see? Man, I worked and worked—— My God, how I hated you! Then you went away suddenly, one morning. I knew why you had gone. I made it my business to know. Be quiet! And the letter you wrote—never reached her."

Kendal was staring across the courtyard at a dead Sepoy, and did not speak.

Fortescue went on,

"No, it never reached her. I saw to that. And then I had a clear field. I told her—a lot of things about you, Kendal. Oh, but I did it cleverly! I was your oldest friend! Me! And I let things out in hints—accidentally, of course. And pretended to shield you. I told her why you had gone off, and she—— Ha, ha, ha! You idiot! I asked her to marry me—— Do you hear, Kendal? I asked her to marry me. Why don't you say something, you image! She said she couldn't. Oh, yes, she was nice enough about it! She always was nice, wasn't she, Kendal? I asked her if she cared for you, and she said she did—— Let me finish! She said she could never marry me because of—because of you, you

Digitized by Google

grinning ape! God knows why! But women are queer things! I've learned that, at least! And would I fetch you back? Why had you gone—she'd forgotten I'd already told her—without leaving a line? Why——" Fortescue stopped.

"Go on!" said Kendal.

"I always hated you, Kendal. She said she couldn't write to you herself, but would I find you and say that nothing would make any difference? She was crying, I remember, and I was sick with life. It was always you, always in my way, somehow, everywhere. But I beat you there, Kendal. I beat you there! And it made up for everything else. I said I would fetch you back to her. Ha, ha, ha! I went away to London, and then I wrote to her as I had promised. I said I'd spoken to you and that you—that you didn't care two straws for her. Oh, but I put it cleverly! There was another girl, I hinted, not a nice girl at all. Ha, ha, ha! Funniest thing you ever heard in all your life, isn't it, Kendal? Don't look like that, you—you devil! It's a treat, after all these years, to talk to you without having to pretend. I told you I hated you more than anything in this world, Kendal, didn't I? I meant to, anyway. So you know it now. And we're going to die together, you and I. I don't care a ——. I've nothing to live for, but—how about you, Kendal? Yes, I thought so. You don't want to die now, do you? And she said she'd wait for you. You want to go back home and speak to her and tell her what a saint you are and what a swine I've always been, eh? Of course you do, and now——"

Fortescue broke off abruptly and the two men began to laugh as though at some brilliant jest.

Kendal walked slowly away. He felt dazed and bewildered, yet strangely happy. It was better to die knowing, after all.

The tattered remnants of the Jack fluttered in the evening breeze. He nodded to it, almost light-heartedly.

" 'Fraid you'll be hauled down to-night, old flag!"

The attack came suddenly, with no preliminary rifle-fire or shouts, and there followed a fierce ten minutes of hand-to-hand fighting, in which sick and wounded men joined, emerging from the hospital to kill before they died.

The rush failed, and the Pathans drew back sullenly in the darkness. It was very cold, and rain fell in torrents. The Sepoys waited, gripping their rifles with numbed fingers, wet to the skin.

The unexpected dawn found them still waiting.

Afar off, they heard a dull crackle of rifles.

An hour passed; it was daylight; the rain had ceased and the sun pierced the gray clouds.

Kendal crouched on the tower by the flag-pole, watching the road along which a body of troops marched swiftly, their bayonets glinting in the sunlight. The Sepoys talked in low whispers, too tired to show any interest. Some of them slept in the mud, side by side with the quiet dead.

THERE was no cheering, no wild welcome from the garrison, no enthusiasm.

Kendal stood at the head of his men, an unwashed, blood-stained derelict in filthy khaki, staring straight in front of him.

"Present arms!" And the thirty-five Sikhs and twenty Dogras, almost too exhausted to hold their rifles, saluted.

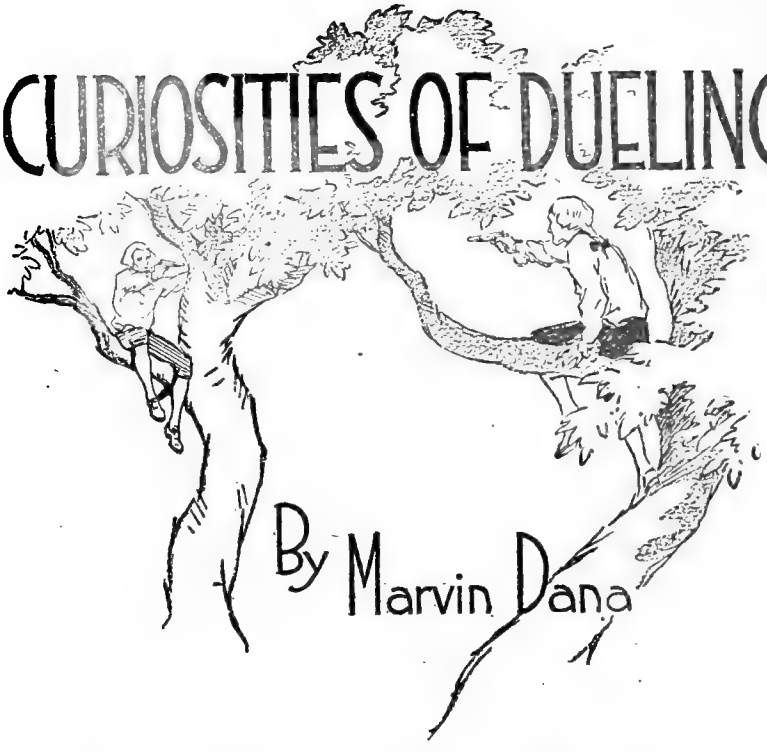
The Sikhs and Gurkhas of the relief-column looked at them pityingly, and passed in silence. Their British officers said a few rough words of greeting.

Kendal choked, and everything swam before his tired eyes. He felt weak and sick, his head throbbed with fever. He neither heard the tramp of marching feet nor the crash of rifle-butts on the ground as the column halted. His mind was far and far away from the little fort, with its broken parapets and burnt tower and the piles of dead and the shreds of faded cloth hanging from the flagpole. He was trying to recall something that had happened to him, something a man had told him years and years ago, which was going to change his whole life. Somebody was waiting for him; he did not know where or why; he did not know who had told him.

Then he turned and saw Fortescue, seated with his back against the ruins of the wall, and he remembered.

Digitized by Google

CURIOSITIES OF DUELING



By Marvin Dana

THE Czar has just exalted the duty of the duel as above that of religion. Kumroff, a regimental surgeon, sued a civilian with whom he had quarreled, and won a judgment of one hundred dollars. His Colonel made complaint to the Czar, who sent for Kumroff, and demanded to know why the surgeon had resorted to the courts instead of to the duel. The culprit explained that he had religious scruples against dueling.

"Religion," the autocrat retorted, "is one thing; honor is another." And he commanded the surgeon's resignation.

In the German *Reichstag* a Socialist recently attacked William for the imperial sanction given to dueling. He concluded a fierce denunciation with the assertion that were the royal exemption from the code removed so that the Crown Prince might become a principal in an affair of honor, the Kaiser would instantly put the ban on such personal combats.

It is probable that the allegation of the Socialist was without any warrant, and that, did honor permit, the Kaiser would send his heir to the field without a whimper. But this charge, as well as the Czar's pronouncement, calls attention anew to the fact that dueling is still encouraged by the highest civilization on the continent of Europe, though for generations the divinity that doth hedge about a king has commanded that the immediate family of royalty, as well as the sovereign himself, must not be exposed to such peril of bullet or blade. Aforetime it was not so. Many kings became famous for prowess in personal encounters with the foe, and more than once a duel has served to determine sovereignty. There has been nothing of the sort, however, in recent history, although only skilled diplomacy avoided an encounter between George III of England and Frederick of Prussia.

KING GEORGE'S DUEL

THESE two peppery and opinionated monarchs had a long list of grievances between them. At the time of crisis, the chief quarrels between them were over marriages and Mecklenburg. Finally they agreed to settle their disputes by a personal combat according to the code.

Digitized by Google

King George chose, as his second, Brigadier-General Sulton, while Colonel Dersheim was to serve Frederick. George was in residence at Hanover. The Prussian monarch was at Saltzdahl, which is near Brunswick. Arrangements for the duel were formally completed, and Hildesheim, on account of its convenient location, was selected for the place of meeting. Naturally those in the confidence of the two sovereigns were in a state of frightened suspense, and every effort was made to prevent the fight. These failed, however, until the Prussian minister to the Court of St. James by a ruse secured a slight delay. The interval sufficed to remove the causes of bitterest contention, and the monarchs grew calm enough to hear reason.

Under all the circumstances, that would have been the most curious of duels had it been brought to pass. The outcome might have been either farcical or tragical.

For the matter of that, there have been actual meetings aplenty of either kind, the ludicrous or the ghastly.

A COMBAT IN THE TREE-TOPS

PERHAPS the absurdest duel was fought in the eighteenth century. The Marquis Merle de Sainte-Marie was an indefatigable duelist. Another gentleman almost equally busy on the field was Monsieur Pierrot d'Isaac. Now, *pierrot* in French is sparrow, and *merle* is blackbird. Out of these seemingly innocent facts came combat, for d'Isaac, on a visit to the nobleman, delivered himself in this wise:

"I am Bonapartist, *monsieur le marquis:* you are Royalist. I am the sparrow: you are the blackbird. Isn't there one bird too many?"

The Marquis gracefully accepted this suave statement of the situation.

"Precisely!" he agreed. "My choice is pistols." And he added, "As is appropriate for birds of our species, let us fight in the trees."

This whimsical suggestion was carried out. The seconds had their places on the ground, but the principals were aloft in the branches of trees that stood the requisite distance apart. The instigator of the duel was the victim, for at the first fire d'Isaac received a bullet in the leg, which sent him crashing through the branches. He managed to seize one of the lower limbs, and from there was helped down by his seconds.

But the Marquis failed to be discreet in the time of victory. Seeing his adversary laid low, he began twittering joyously, imitating the song of a blackbird. D'Isaac only waited for his leg to heal before issuing a challenge on account of the offensive chirping, and in this second encounter, which lacked any bizarre feature, except its cause, the Marquis de Sainte-Marie was severely wounded.

A duel more amusing in a wholesome way was fought in our own country some seventy-five years ago. An itinerant preacher named Brown used to travel through Kentucky. He was a man possessed of mighty sinews, and, too, of a certain skill that would have delighted a league-manager, as the event showed. In his exercise of the ministerial function, he scathingly rebuked a man of notorious profligacy, who retorted with a challenge.

The parson, as the challenged party, had choice of weapons. He selected for each combatant a half-bushel of Irish potatoes—large ones, solid and well rounded. The further stipulations of the engagement were for a distance of fifteen paces and the taking of only one potato at a time from the receptacle.

The profligate protested, but in vain. Eventually the two met in accordance with the clergyman's requirements. When the word was given, the parson instantly hurled a potato, which caught his enemy in the ribs before the man could lay hold on a missile.

The first was followed by five others, and every one smote the wretched target. The victim never even secured a potato, much 'ess threw one. Each time he reached for one, another from his foe smote him sore. After the sixth potato had struck, he fell unconscious, and it was a week before he recovered sufficiently to leave his bed.

The farcical result of this resort to the field of honor had a very considerable effect in bringing dueling into local disrepute.

Another instance in which curious weapons served the need of combatants occurred a few years ago in Paris. Tintard, a journalist, became engaged in a quarrel with a rival, while the two men were in a restaurant along with the lady of their affections.

A duel was agreed on, and such was the wrathful haste of the jealous suitors that

Digitized by Google

they rushed forthwith to the apartments of the woman without troubling to secure pistols or swords. Umbrellas were substituted for rapiers, and the fight followed. Tintard was the victim. The ferrule of his adversary's umbrella gouged out an eye, and he fell, half swooning from the pain. The maddened victor stamped upon the wounded man's face and skull, and Tintard died within a few days from inflammation of the brain.

In contrast to the gruesomeness of this happening, there was the happy issue to the predicament of an Irishman in Spain, who was challenged by an hidalgo famed for skill in fence. The Irishman, having no art of sword-play, was not minded to lose his life unnecessarily, and, like the Kentucky parson, set his wit for defense. He chose shillalahs for weapons, explaining, with perfect truth, that these were the national weapons of his country.

The don remonstrated in vain. He investigated the nature of the unknown fighting-tool, and what he learned caused him to withdraw the challenge.

DEATH IN THE DARK

AMONG the oddities in the history of dueling, there have been a very few duels fought in the dark. In one, Rossi, an actor of much repute in Italy a generation ago, was a principal. He was playing in Cassala, when he was annoyed by the talking of a gentleman in the audience, who had dined too well. Finally, Rossi, in exasperation, ordered the disturber to leave the theater. The gentleman did so, but the experience left him both sobered and insulted.

He accosted Rossi after the performance, and issued a peremptory challenge, which was accepted by the actor. The two adjourned to Rossi's hotel, for a meeting without seconds. Somehow the landlord's suspicions were aroused and, to avoid his interference, the angry men agreed to fight with pistols in the actor's chamber, without any lights, but each with a glowing cigarette to guide his enemy's aim. Of a sudden the landlord heard two reports and, on rushing into the room, found Rossi uninjured, the other with a shattered shoulder.

Another duel was fought in the dark of outdoors. This occurred in England, about a hundred years ago, and was the outcome of an acrimonious political debate in the House of Commons, in which Isaac Corry and Henry T. Grattan were concerned.

In concluding a bitter denunciation, Corry declared that Grattan, if he had his deserts, would be arraigned before the bar of justice as a felon. At once, on leaving the House, a duel was arranged between the two men, to take place without a moment's delay. It was a pitch-black night, but this fact was not allowed to interfere with the meeting, which occurred forthwith, without even a single torch to relieve the darkness.

The opponents used swords, and could only guess the accuracy of thrust, parry and ripost from the intermittent contact of their blades. Grattan achieved the victory by inflicting a severe wound in Corry's sword-arm.

In another duel, fought in something very close to darkness, one of the principals was Lord Byron, a granduncle of the poet. A Mr. Chatworth, a neighbor and intimate friend of the nobleman, was the other combatant. The two met in a room at the Star and Garter, which at that time occupied the present site of the Carleton Club in London. There were no witnesses, and but a solitary rushlight. Chatsworth was slain, and there was much gossip of foul play, against which was nothing beyond the unsupported word of Lord Byron.

The nobleman was driven from society, and spent the remainder of his days at Newstead, where he comforted his loneliness with a hobby. He had served in the Navy, and now had two tiny forts erected on the lake shore of his estate, which waged mimic war with a baby man-of-war, made from a vessel he had brought from the coast on wheels.

So recently as December 23, 1912, rival suitors fought in a darkened room in Washington, Pennsylvania, and one of them was found with a bullet hole through his neck. As this was in America, a truly American touch was added to the duello, for a posse of miners was promptly organized to hunt for the successful duelist.

THE MOST FREAKISH OF ALL

UNDOUBTEDLY the most freakish of all duels was one fought in 1808 in Paris. The principals were rivals, between whom the woman in the case refused to choose. The weapons selected were blun-

Digitized by Google

derbusses, the ground was the air—for the shots were to be exchanged from balloons in process of ascension. The seconds exhibited an astounding amount of sporting spirit by accompanying the principals aloft.

At the first fire the envelope of one balloon was penetrated and the gas exploded. In the fall to earth both principal and second were killed. Thus simply was the woman relieved of choosing.

Two other rivals were Henri Delagrave and Alphonse Rivière, who confided the arrangements for an affair of honor to their seconds. As the duel was to be *à outrance*, one of the seconds, who was a physician, conceived the idea of leaving the issue to fate, in the shape of a poisoned pellet.

To this end, he made up four black pills. One of these contained prussic acid. When the meeting occurred, Delagrave won the toss of the coin, by which his adversary was forced to take a pellet first. Rivière selected one of the black balls and swallowed it. A brief interval proved that he had not taken the poison. Delagrave then took his turn, and he also escaped. Again it was the choice of Rivière, who stared for a long time at the twin pellets in which lay hidden his life or his death. Finally he seized a pellet hastily—swallowed it. Within a few moments he was dead.

Another instance when the determination of the affair was left to chance was in the case of an Englishman, challenged by a Frenchman. The Englishman was without skill either for fence or shooting, while his adversary was renowned for both. The Englishman had no wish to be murdered, and set his ingenuity to devise a means of equality in the encounter. As a result of his pondering, he stipulated that the duel should be with pistols, but that only one of the two weapons should be loaded with ball, and that first choice of them should be left to a toss. The weapons thus apportioned, the combatants should fire from stations only two paces apart. This, of course, meant almost certain death for the holder of the pistol with the blank charge. The skilled duelist won the toss and had first choice. He spent considerable time in examination of the twin weapons, balancing them, first one and then the other, in his hand, in an effort to distinguish between the weights, as he knew that the fully loaded one must be the heavier. But chance is stronger than any skill. At the fire the Frenchman fell dead, while the Englishman suffered only some scorching from the blank charge.

About the middle of the fourteenth century there occurred in Paris a duel unique in all history: a formal combat between a man and a dog, under the authorization of the King. Aubryde Montdidier was murdered, and his body buried in a wood outside the capital. His dog found the grave and remained guarding it until driven away by starvation. Afterward the faithful beast led searchers to the spot, and thus made known the crime.

Soon afterward this same dog flew at the throat of the Chevalier Macaire. The suspicion thus directed against the Chevalier finally culminated in the King's edict that the guilt or innocence of the accused should be put to proof by trial of combat between the man and the dog, a huge hound.

The affair was carried to a conclusion in due form. In the arena the dog when loosed instantly sprang for the throat of his enemy, and sunk his fangs there in a death grip. All the man's efforts to save himself were futile. When at last the frenzied brute was torn from his prey, the guilty wretch had just time to whisper a confession before he expired.

A DWARF ON THE FIELD OF HONOR

ANOTHER oddity among affairs of honor had for one of the principals a dwarf. This was Jeffrey Hudson, an Englishman, who from his eighth to his thirtieth year measured just eighteen inches in height. Then this astonishing person began to grow, and kept at it until he had attained a height of three feet and nine inches. But diminutive stature proved no bar to an adventurous career. On a journey from the Continent to England he was captured by a Dunkirk privateer. Afterward he fell into the hands of Barbary pirates. He escaped finally, and returned home to become a captain of horse in the Civil Wars.

It was in France, however, whither he had gone in attendance on his Queen, that the duel occurred. Some dispute arose between him and another Englishman, named Crofts.

A meeting with pistols was arranged. On account of his low stature, Hudson was accorded the privilege of being mounted

Digitized by Google

on horseback, while his adversary remained afoot, which was fair enough, since Crofts was a tall man. The dwarf, unharmed himself, mortally wounded his enemy at the first fire.

Long before the days of militant suffragettes, women asserted their rights by engaging in the duello, although such encounters were frowned on by the authorities.

One of the most notable was fought over Chassé, a famous singer of the old French Academy, in which the principals were two love-sick women, both of the nobility, the one Polish, the other French. The weapons were pistols, and the Frenchwoman was severely wounded. An unsympathetic Government shut up the passionate French countess in a convent and expelled her rival from the country.

Something of the modern press-agent flavor clusters about the affair of honor between Marotte Beaupré and Catherine de Urlis, actresses of the *Hôtel Bourgogne*. Their meeting occurred on the stage of the theater, and revealed some clever sword-play, but not too much blood.

In an encounter on horseback, with pistols, between Melinte and Prelanie, which resulted from a quarrel over a greyhound, the fair Melinte was severely wounded by her charming antagonist, and, too, she lost the dog.

France was indeed the happy home of dueling until after the Napoleonic wars. Then it practically ceased. There had been enough of fighting, enough of death.

But there came a revival with the restoration, which soon waxed absurd and at last made dueling wholly ridiculous.

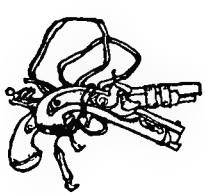
The influence of democracy caused tradesmen to resort to a practise hitherto confined to those far above them in the social scale. The barber challenged the hardware-dealer who sold him a damaged stove. The charcoal-seller had an affair of honor with the huckster who sold him onions in a short measure. Such vulgarization of the noble art of maiming and killing wrought havoc with the prestige of the code. Indeed, in France, that stigma has never been wholly removed, and, as a rule, affairs of honor there are to-day without that underlying seriousness which they possess in other countries of Europe.

Spain, from the standpoint of the duelist, is entitled to credit for being both sincere and strictly up-to-date in maintaining the code. As an instance in point may be mentioned an encounter arranged between two members of a bicycle club of Granada, named respectively Perez and Moreno.

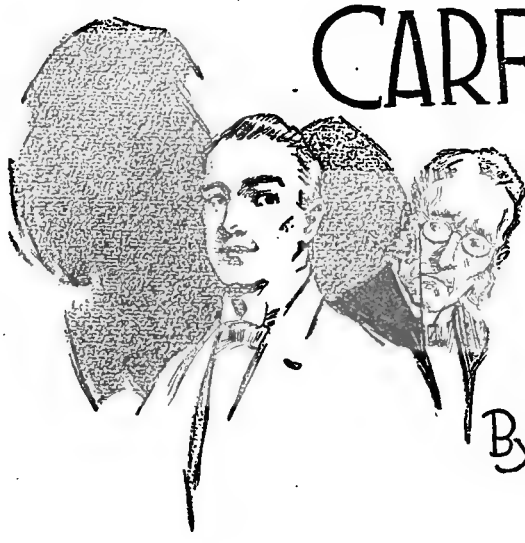
This was fought by the men from their wheels, with the deadly knife known as the *navaga*. The place of meeting was a lonely bit of the Melaga road. Perez inflicted a severe wound in the left arm of Moreno, then was killed by a thrust in the right breast.

EXIT THE DUELLO

MAETERLINCK wrote a wonderful defense of dueling, but since then he has taken to boxing with such enthusiasm that we may believe he has recanted. Certainly the sentiment of to-day is hostile to the code, despite the archaic preferences of Czar and Kaiser. Nowadays we are fostering human life to the limit, with science struggling wildly for the survival of the unfit. Luckily, while we are saving the diseased and criminal, we also incline to preserve the hale and honorable. We are not minded to let good men be slain for the whimsies of the code. We leave dueling to the stark ignorance of mountaineers, to the viciousness of thugs in city gangs and to the antiquated habit of the finest gentlemen of Europe.



Digitized by Google



CARFEW TAKES ADVICE

By Edgar Wallace

WILBRAHAM HAMSHAW TENOR was an American citizen. So was his father and so was his grandfather.

Grandpa, who was just plain Bill Tenor, and had not acquired any Wilbrahamness, was a great man for giving advice.

He advised indignant citizens who felt they had been robbed to say nothing about it. He advised the robbers to deliver half the goods in return for his friendly offices. He was a lawyer, a politician and a gentleman. His grandest piece of advice was one emblazoned on every real-estate faker's heart; that is found above the desk of a thousand ad-writing students, associated with the real-estate merchants, namely:

YOUNG MAN, BUY LAND

More than this, so frank, so fair, so fine a man was he, that he showed the young men what land they ought to buy. It was his land. He knew more about it than they did—so they bought.

By and by they knew slightly more about the land than he had ever known, and they tried to sell it—quick.

But there was nobody to advise likely buyers, so they mortgaged.

His second greatest effort was:

YOUNG MAN, GO WEST

It will be noted that he never advised the old men to go. Most of them had been.

So powerful an adviser was he that many thousands followed his directing finger and went West.

Bill just stayed right where he was—East. And he made a fortune. His son doubled it, and then came Wilbraham Hamshaw Tenor, an American of Americans. The finest product of the age. He lived in Paris. He had a country-house in England. He drew his dividends from America. He was an American gentleman.

After a while he took out letters of acclimatization—it amounted to that—and swore that he would be a "loyal and faithful subject of his Majesty King Edward VII and true allegiance bear unto him, so help him God." Thus, at the age of forty-eight, he became an English gentleman, or at any rate, English.

Wil Ham, following the family traditions, continued to advise. He advised a northern constituency to send him to Parliament, and the northern constituency advised him—by 4703 votes to 1594—to go to the devil.

He advised the Premier, with whom he was on such good terms as to be allowed to contribute to the party-funds, to create him a peer of the realm; but the premier was a cautious man and suggested that he

Digitized by Google

should wait fifty years or so, because the sanitation of the House of Lords was so deplorable that he could not, dared not, risk so valuable a life as that of Wil Ham Tenor.

HE ADVISED, did Wilbraham Hamshaw Tenor, no less a person than Felix Carfew, a gentleman of leisure and a pleasant adventurer, and Carfew accepted the advice to his profit.

Carfew, who was spending a holiday in the country, saved the life of Wilbraham Hamshaw's daughter.

This is romantic, and I'm very sorry. But it can't be helped. The daughter was punting in the little river which runs through the house park, and Carfew, sitting on the bank, with his back to a board which informed him that "Trespassers will be shot by order," or words to that effect, was idly watching her.

She was a slim, pretty girl, but not Carfew's kind. So he was telling himself when her punt came abreast of him, and she stopped poling, to eye him severely.

"I say," she said (you will observe how deplorably English she was), "what are you doing in our park?"

He rose and took off his hat.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

"What are you doing in our park ?

"I was sitting down," said Carfew.

"But you mustn't sit down in our park," said the girl petulantly. "My poppa is Wilbraham Hamshaw Tenor, Esquire, and you will be prosecuted."

"It seems a very inadequate reason," said Carfew calmly.

"You are not an artist, are you?" she asked suddenly. "Poppa does not allow artists in our park."

"I am not an artist," said Carfew impressively. "I am a gentleman."

He thought she looked dubiously at him, and he was nettled.

"You ought to go away," she said. "We don't want strangers in our park."

Carfew sighed wearily.

"Can't you think of something else to say?" he asked. "This 'our-parking' of yours is getting on my nerves. I never turn people out of *my* park."

She was ready to be annoyed with him, but curiosity and interest got the better of her.

"Have you a park?" she asked.

"Yes," said Carfew carelessly, "I have several, Central Park, Hyde Park——"

The girl uttered an exclamation of annoyance, stooped to pick up her pole, overbalanced and fell into the stream.

She gave a little scream, but picked herself up and began to wade ashore.

"Isn't it any deeper than that?" asked Carfew, from the bank.

"Go away, you wretched man," she snapped.

"Because," said Carfew, "if it isn't, I'm coming in to rescue you."

And, with no more ado, he stepped boldly into the water.

It was by no means a simple task, the rescue of Wilbraham Hamshaw Tenor's daughter, for the bottom of the stream was full of little holes and pitfalls, and she was glad to have the assistance of this blatant young man.

Twice he made a false step and went up to his neck in water and, when at length he reached the bank, he was pardonably indignant.

"You told me it wasn't very deep," he said reproachfully. "I might have lost my life. Really, for a person who owns a park, you are very inconsiderate."

"If you hadn't bothered me, I shouldn't have fallen in," she said, and she was very angry.

"If I hadn't been here when you fell in," he said, "I shudder to think what might have happened to you."

All the way to the big house he talked to her, telling her of the danger she had escaped, describing similar accidents which had occurred to friends of his—they were all people of eminent position, and most of them were great public characters—until the girl began to believe that she had indeed escaped deadly peril, and that she had figured in the adventure of her life. He praised her coolness in the moment of danger, and compared it with the panic into which Lady Bagford fell when she was thrown into the sea off Cowes from Carfew's yacht.

"She gave me twenty times the trouble you gave me," said Carfew reminiscently, "and I assure you that there was no more danger than if she had fallen into my private swimming-bath at Blenheim House."

Carfew was a good talker, and in the half-mile walk he brought about a revolution in the girl's opinion of him and his conduct.

Digitized by Google

In the end, she forgot that he was a trespasser and that his outrageous conduct had provoked the accident. If she did not forget that, she certainly did not tell her father.

Carfew was taken to a room, clothing of an approximate fit was found for him and he was invited to stay to dinner.

"I am greatly obliged to you," said Wilbraham Hamshaw.

He was a tall gaunt man, hard-faced and with an eye that chilled. He graciously overlooked Carfew's trespass — a serious offense and worth mentioning. For the grounds were surrounded by barbed wire, and people who strayed from the main and virtuous path which skirted the property were liable to all the pains and penalties that happened to be going.

For Wilbraham Hamshaw was a fine, old, crusted aristocrat by now, and had a genealogical tree which had blossomed in a single night.

"If you can not stay to dinner, come right along and see me in my office," said the host. "I may be able to give you a little advice."

Of course, Carfew never for one moment dreamed that anybody could be so foolish as to offer advice to him. He accepted the word as a euphemism for a sensible portion of Mr. Tenor's fortune.

HE WENT back to London elated, for this adventure was one after his own heart. He was a rescue specialist. Once, on the Thames Embankment, he had rescued from death an elderly colonel of Engineers—at least, he had told him to "look out" on the approach of a taxicab—and that colonel of Engineers had laid the foundation of Carfew's fortune.

Carfew went back to Blenheim House—which is situated in Bloomsbury Square, and for the use of one room in which lordly establishment he paid twenty shillings a week—whistling a little tune. He was still whistling when he turned on the tap of his private swimming-bath, to the intense annoyance of the medical student who occupied the chamber next to the bathroom.

Now, although Mr. Wilbraham Hamshaw had shaken the dust of the United States from his Bond Street shoes, and had severed the bonds which bound him to his native land, he still collected dust of an auriferous character, and was interested in such bonds as paid half-yearly dividends with sickening monotony.

Looking him up in the Stock Exchange Year-Book, Carfew discovered that he was a director in such public companies as the Little Manhattan Corporation, the Denver Consolidated Smelting Association, the Pittsburg Vulcan Corporation (capital $1,000,000,000 *ad. lib.*) and the New York Lands and Finance Corporation, to say nothing of the Dawn Life Assurance Company.

"He'll probably make me a director, too," thought Carfew.

The London office of Mr. Wilbraham Hamshaw was 965 Lombard Street, which was also the London offices of the corporations aforesaid.

Carfew wrote a little note saying that he would call.

The millionaire's secretary replied that he regretted his employer would be out of town on Tuesday, and would Thursday suit Mr. Canfam? Which annoyed the young man very much, because his name was not Canfam, though, as he signed it, it looked very much like it.

He sat down and wrote to the secretary:

DEAR SIR:—I am directed by Mr. Felix Carfew to thank you for your letter of even date. In reply, Mr. Carfew asks me to say that, though he was leaving town for his country place at Harrogate on Thursday, he will put off his journey till the following day, and will be pleased to call on Mr. Wilbraham Hamshaw Tenor at the hour named.

He signed the letter "Adolphus Brown," and despatched it with the comforting sense of having held up his end.

Punctually to the minute, he arrived at the Lombard Street office. He would have come in a hired electric brougham, but, having surveyed the office on the evening previous, he de ided that it was very unlikely that Wilbraham's private office would be in the front of the building, and still less likely that he would witness his arrival, even if the office were so situated, for, as Carfew knew, millionaires did not spend their days looking out of windows.

HE WAS ushered to a reception-room and, after a reasonable period of waiting, a uniformed attendant led him along a carpeted corridor, tapped respectfully on a rosewood door and showed the young man into a room which contained

Digitized by Google

a map, a square of carpet, a big desk, an easy chair and W. H. Tenor, Esquire.

The millionaire removed his glasses and nodded to Carfew.

"Sit down, Mr.—er——"

Carfew refused to help him.

"Mr. Carfew, eh? Well, I'm sorry I could not see you before."

He looked at his watch.

"A little too early for lunch. Now just tell me something about yourself. I am under an obligation to you, and I should like to be of some service to you."

This was the kind of talk Carfew wanted to hear. And he told Wilbraham Hamshaw something about himself.

He related some things and hinted at others.

He inferred that he, Carfew, was the type of man no great corporation could afford to be without. He suggested that the one idea which obsessed the important city houses was to secure his services on the board of directors. He spoke airily of contracts he had secured, concessions he had obtained.

"Let's go to lunch," said a weary Wilbraham.

They drove in his car to the Savoy.

Carfew pointed out, in a subtle way, the enormous advantage of youth. He hinted that he could influence the press to an extraordinary degree, but had never yet had occasion to do so. He admitted that he held no directorships, because he had fought shy of anything but the best companies.

"Here we are," said his host.

A table had been reserved for them and, when the choice of the wine had been made, Carfew continued.

"I'm at rather a loose end just now," he confessed. "A young man with money, energy and initiative, who achieves some distinction in a quiet way, is inclined to let himself go to rust, if opportunity does not offer itself. As I was saying to the German Ambassador some time ago—we were traveling together——"

The conversation in question took place when Carfew, a very young and confident reporter, forced his way into his Excellency's state cabin and bullied him into giving an interview.

Of course, Carfew explained, he did not wish to take advantage of so small a service as saving his Lordship's daughter. After all, there had been very little danger to himself, he added modestly, though at one time he had thought it was all over.

Carfew talked and talked and talked, and the more readily he talked, the more readily did his host accept the position of audience.

He interrupted once to ask Carfew what capital he had. Carfew said he had exactly fifty per cent. more than he possessed.

At the end of the lunch, Mr. Tenor found an opportunity for reviving the best tradition of his ancestors.

"You're an interesting young man. You should go far. I can help you."

Carfew murmured his appreciation.

"I have a considerable experience of the world," the other went on, "especially of the financial world, and I can put you in the way of a fortune."

"That," said Carfew with dignity, "is the road I am looking for."

"I could of course," Wilbraham continued, "give you a directorship, but I haven't one to spare."

Carfew's hopes fell from 100 degrees Fahrenheit to the place where you mustn't shake the mercury for fear it breaks.

"I give you instead—" he paused, and Carfew's hopes took the elevator to the fourth floor—"a little good advice."

The elevator-rope broke and Carfew found himself in the basement, alive but dazed.

This precious advice was not forthcoming until Carfew and the millionaire were outside the building, and the door of the luxurious automobile had been opened for the great man to enter.

"You can make a fortune," said he, "if you let the other fellow do the talking."

It was worthy to rank with "Young man, go West."

Ten minutes later, Carfew was walking slowly in the direction of Bloomsbury, repeating the formula every few steps.

He went to his room, removed his shoes, divested himself of his splendid raiment and lay on the bed, thinking very hard. He went down to dinner in the same subdued mood.

At the end of the meal, he leaned across the table, and said to the young medical student who sat *vis-à-vis*,

"Do you want to make a fortune?"

The student growled wicked words at him.

"But do you?" persisted Carfew.

Digitized by Google

"Of course I do," said the other.

"Well," said Carfew, drawing a long breath, "let the other fellow do the talking. Good evening."

He went to bed that night to some extent mollified. He was not easily snubbed. People who boasted that they had snubbed Carfew were either untruthful or mistaken. But he had been snubbed, and it had been done with a thoroughness which left him no conceit.

HE CAME down to breakfast next morning still digesting his lesson. There was a letter on his table and the flap bore a crest.

"A rabbit rampant eating a carrot couchant," said Carfew disrespectfully. "I wonder if it is from——"

It was, and written in Wilbraham Hamshaw's own hand. Would Carfew call at eleven?

Carfew called, and Dives rose to meet him.

"I sent for you, Carfew," he said with a grim little smile, "because I am afraid I did not make it clear to you that I know exactly what part you played in the rescue of my daughter."

Carfew said nothing. He shrugged his shoulders in self-deprecation.

"And I rather admired your audacity," the other went on. "Moreover, in the advice I have given you, I think you were more than repaid for the ducking you got. But there is one thing I did not ask you, and which I feel sure you will not mind telling me. Exactly why did you seek an introduction to me?"

Carfew smiled, and the millionaire's lips twitched responsively. Carfew did not tell him that, in trespassing in the Home Park, he had had no more idea that it was the property of Wilbraham Hamshaw than he had that Wilbraham Hamshaw Tenor was anything but a name.

"Look here, Carfew." He swung himself round in his chair and faced the young man. "We are both business men. Let us put our cards on the table. I think you will find it worth your while."

"Perhaps that would be wise," said Carfew, after a little pause.

"Some time ago," said Mr. Wilbraham Hamshaw carefully, "representations were made to me regarding——" he coughed and looked unconscious, in the most ostentatious way that a man can look unconscious.

Carfew waited.

"Representations were made to me," repeated the other, "regarding the peerage."

Carfew nodded and smiled. He knew all about it. You could gather that much from his nod, from his smile.

"I do not know whom you represent," Mr. Tenor went on, "but it occurred to me on my way home last night that your visit to my house was not quite as innocent in its character as I had at first thought. My early impression was that you were a bumptious, pushful, self-seeking—er—adventurer. Do you get me?"

"I gather a little from your hints."

"Afterward," Mr. Wilbraham Hamshaw warmed, "it struck me. The peerage!"

"Ah!" said Carfew slyly.

"Let me tell you this," said the millionaire, and his voice was very solemn. "When I give my assurance to the Prime Minister that I am not concerned in the raising of the Chinese loan, I mean every word I say."

He rapped his desk solemnly with his knuckles. "I know that the loan is distasteful to the ministry. I know that I should be opposing the wishes of the Prime Minister if I interested myself in that flotation. You may assure," he paused, then slowly, "Mr. Sieglemann——"

Carfew started violently and Wilbraham Hamshaw laughed triumphantly.

"I guessed it!" he said. He rose from his chair very vehement, very indignant.

"You can go to Mr. Sieglemann," he said rapidly, "and tell him he will get a considerable surprise if he tries to connect me with the loan. I know him! The vulgar jealousy of the man is pitiable. He hasn't an original idea in his head. He did not become a naturalized Englishman until I led the way. He never built a cottage-hospital till I built one, and now his vanity and his jealousy are at work to rob me of the fruits of my labor!"

His voice trembled.

"He knows it would be a blow to my prestige if it were discovered that I assisted in the Chinese flotation, but I tell you that you can not connect me with it, Mr. Carfew."

It was at once a declaration and a challenge, and Carfew rose to it artistically. He rose from his chair at the same time.

"Whether I can or whether I can't," he said diplomatically, "remains to be seen."

Digitized by Google

A look of alarm came into the great man's eyes.

"But can you?" he asked. "What do you think you have discovered?"

Carfew shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing," he said, and smiled meaningly.

He took his departure, leaving Wilbraham Hamshaw Tenor in some perturbation of mind.

"And who the dickens is Sieglemann?" mused Carfew.

He was afterward to discover that Seiglemann also had a grandpa, who had a store on the East Side of New York; that Seiglemann, with a castle in Derbyshire and a shooting in Scotland, was also a Briton by Act of Parliament, and moreover had social aspirations. But that, as a great friend of mine remarks when he hasn't time to work out a plot, is another story.

Carfew found a wire waiting for him at Blenheim House.

Call and see me five o'clock, 104 Berkeley Square.
TENOR.

HE PRESENTED himself at the house five minutes late. He could have been there a quarter of an hour before the appointed time, but he thought better to arrive after the hour.

Wilbraham, pacing the polished floor of his library, was a little impatient.

"You ought to keep your appointments to the minute, young man," he said. "Sit down. Will you have tea?"

Carfew shook his head.

"I have just come from the Ritz," he said simply.

"Seen Sieglemann?" demanded the other sharply.

Carfew smiled.

"No," he said truthfully, "I have seen nobody but my doctor."

He had bumped into the medical student in the hall of Blenheim House, and, remembering the unpleasant things young Esculapius had said, Carfew's description was a very kindly one.

"Now," said Wilbraham, "I want to know definitely what you have discovered."

"Nothing," said Carfew firmly.

"Did my foolish daughter say anything to you?"

Carfew shook his head. His lips were tightly pressed, as though to guard against an unwitting admission.

"I know no more than—" he paused, weighing his words—"than Sieglemann suspects."

It was very bold of Carfew, and he was in a momentary panic lest he had said too much.

"Indeed," said the millionaire grimly, "you know that, do you? I was right—I was right!" he muttered, and shook his head threateningly. "When did you find out?"

Carfew hesitated.

"I know nothing more," he said slowly, "than I knew after lunch yesterday."

"After lunch yesterday?" repeated the other. "After you had lunch with me?"

"Exactly," said Carfew.

They eyed each other as the matador and the bull eye one another before the final *coup*.

"But I said very little," protested Wilbraham Hamshaw, speaking half to himself. "You did all the talking."

Carfew did not speak then.

"When do you make your report to Sieglemann?" demanded Tenor.

"I may not make it," responded Carfew.

The millionaire sat nibbling the end of an ivory paper-knife.

"I can pay, and pay well, for information," he said at last. "If you know anything worth knowing, you can sell your report to me."

Carfew again hesitated, but the millionaire opened his desk and, taking out a check-book, wrote with some deliberation therein. He tore out the slip and handed it to the other.

"I have made it payable to bearer," he said.

Carfew took the form, placed it in his pocket. Without haste he took up his hat.

"The report?"

Carfew smiled.

"I have forgotten—everything," he said.

"That is right. You will go far, my friend. And remember," he added, as they shook hands before parting, "the little piece of advice I gave you at the Savoy was meant in earnest. Let the other fellow do the talking."

"I haven't forgotten *that!*" said Carfew, with an internal smile. "I've taken your advice!"

Digitized by Google

DOWN THE OLD MISSISSIPP'

How Three Men and a Motor-Boat Drifted into Amusing Adventures Among the River-Folk

By Raymond S. Spears

CHAPTER I

THE *MOONSHINE* BUMPS INTO THINGS

THE cruising launch *Moonshine* shot into New Madrid eddy and rounded up to the fish-dock with a bump that slid a forty-pound catfish off the block. The marketman, however, merely smiled his acknowledgments, for he was used to the amateur navigation of fancy gasoline-boats, and the *Moonshine* bore all the earmarks of a profitable customer of the fish-dock. It would buy fish, ammunition, oil, gasoline, things to eat, an anchor or two—lots of things, in fact.

But the fish-dock man was not the only experienced observer with an eye on the *Moonshine*. Sitting on a stranded cypress-snag was a little man with large hands, a smooth face and very small eyes. He wore a straw hat with a red band, a negligee shirt, Oxford ties, and trousers that had been pressed. No sooner had the launch smashed into the dock than he ran down to lend a hand on the lines, for the man on the bow of the launch had nearly lost his footing on the bump and had failed to make fast.

"Throw the line there!" the little man called, and in two minutes he had the launch fast in shipshape fashion and was talking with flipper movements of his marvelously large hands.

"My name's Henry Doldrum," he remarked, by way of introduction. "It's beautiful traveling down the Mississippi. I've done lots of it myself. Lost the prettiest little launch you ever saw, down in St. Francis Bend, a year or so ago. I like the river so well I neglect my business just to come down and look at it."

"It's our first trip down," the tall, slender man remarked, with the apologetic manner of the tenderfoot. "My name is Ralph Calliper, and the others are John Wattics and Will Coaner. We've had lots of experience in boats on the Erie canal—rowboats and canoes and so on, you know. We're from Utica——"

"Is that so? Utica! Well, I declare! You know, I used to have a partner lived in Utica. He used to talk a lot about Sheriff Gilmore, Judge O'Connor—all those people."

"What! Hey, boys, here's a fellow knows about Utica! What do you think of that—Gilmore, Judge O'Connor——! You know, Mr. Doldrum, this is the first time we've met anybody who knew where Utica

Digitized by Google

was, since we come on the river. Wattics, Mr. Doldrum—Mr. Coaner. What do you think of that? This world isn't so large, is it, boys? Think of meeting somebody here, two thousand miles away from home, who knows Utica!"

"Glad to meet you, gentlemen. I don't know Utica myself, but I've heard Sam—Sam Calman—tell about Utica, many 's the time. He used to tell about Judge O'Connor a lot—funny stories, you know."

"Yessir!" the three exclaimed in unison, crowding around the little man, who talked glibly of Utica and its notable features.

"*Thought* you'd take a trip down old Mississipp', eh?" the little man asked.

"Yes, we'd heard a lot about it, and we thought we'd spend the Winter down here—um-m—what a strange river it is!"

"WELL, yes, till you get used to it, but you know, after you've been on the river a while, you'll just love it. At first it seems a little strange!" The little man stared out at the yellow flood pouring by, awed a little by the way things happen. "You need somebody with you that knows the river, for a while anyhow. It's a tricky, embarrassing old stream, first along. You don't know what to expect. First time I come down it, I was awful' lonesome at first. My wife had just died—" he caught his breath, and the three nodded sympathetically—"but before long I got so I understood the river, and now—well, now I neglect my business for it. I'm an automobile-dealer and gasoline-engine-jobber."

"By Jove! Is that so? Say, perhaps you could tell us why we can't reverse our engine. Something's the matter with the gear."

"Be glad to, gentlemen!"

"John, you and Will go up and get those groceries, and Mr. Doldrum and I'll go aboard. That engine's what makes us bump in so hard."

"I see! Mighty pretty launch. About thirty-eight feet long?"

"Exactly—good eye you've got!"

"Oh, you know when you hang around the river a good deal you get so you know things. Now here's what's the matter with that gear. You see, when you go to throw it over, that nut there keeps the handle from going over at all—that nut must have fallen into it."

"By Jove! I thought that nut belonged in that hole!"

"Oh, no! Lot of funny fixings to a motor-boat, but loose nuts banging around in the gears and engines don't generally belong there!"

"I see. I'm a thousand times obliged to you. Can't I——"

"None of that! One sport—a sportsman always helps another in time of trouble, you know. Glad to do it!"

They went into the cabin and Doldrum sat back luxuriously in a wicker chair.

"This is plumb comfort!" he muttered. "Mahogany finish. You know, mahogany is a very good wood, beautiful and strong. But I'm a little prejudiced against it. I like a bright, light cabin. I had all the woodwork of my cabin white enamel—the little launch I lost down in St. Francis Bend. That was so I could see, and the lights would be bright instead of somber."

"That's so. Dark wood does absorb the light. I never thought of that."

"But you've got lots of light-power here. Electricity and gas, too—that's a good idea. Lots of times you don't want to have the motor running—um-m."

The other two men were coming down the bank on the run, and, as they started to jump aboard, Doldrum remarked to Calliper,

"Here's those fellows' watches and money—you see, you fellows are tenderfeet on the river, so I thought I'd give you a little lesson. Don't say anything. We'll have some fun."

"Hey, Ralph! Our pockets was picked! Bet that feller—er——"

"What's the trouble?" Doldrum remarked casually.

"Why—why—you see—you see, when we went to pay for—pay for what we ordered, our money was gone!"

"You're real careless. I noticed some pocketbooks and watches on that shelf there——"

"By thunder! Here's your pocketbook, Bill. That your watch, Ralph?"

"What? What the ——! I—you——"

"THAT'S all right, gentlemen. Now sit down. I knew you were greenhorns the minute I seen—saw you rounding into that eddy, wrong end to—you ought to have come on the down eddy side—and so I said, it'd be a mercy if I'd

Digitized by Google

just let you see a thing or two. When I was a boy, my ambition was to be a pick-pocket—funny notion, wasn't it?—and we used to practise a lot. I knew from the way you looked, you'd be an easy mark if some real river-crook come along, so I said I'd give you a lesson you wouldn't forget. Course, I'm all right, but you didn't know I wasn't the slickest crook ever picked a goose. Why, if some river-crook had happened to be here, and I hadn't been, he'd had your shirts by this time. This is the finest river in the world, the most beautiful place in the world, but it has its drawbacks, and one of them is river-crooks. You're all right if you keep your eyes open, but, if you don't, some real crook will skin you from top to bottom."

"By Jove, old man, we hadn't an idea it was as bad as that down here! We're a thousand times obliged to you!"

"That's all right. If I hadn't liked you, I'd never have bothered to warn you, but you look like good sports, you do, and I want you to have the time of your lives down here—adventure, hunting, novel experiences and all that. But I don't want to see you imposed on by some—by some contemptible river-rat!"

"It's awfully good of you, old man. Do you live in New Madrid?"

"Oh, no, I'm from St. Paul, on my way down the Mississippi. I expect to pass the Winter down the river. I was just wondering whether I would buy a shanty-boat or a skiff, or drop down the river with somebody——"

"By Jove—say, won't you drop down with us? Be awful glad to have you! We got four bunks, an' there's only three of us."

"Why—you see—I've just been warning you about strangers——"

"Oh Hades, you're all right. You wouldn't go at us that way. Come on! We need looking after like a lot of sheep!"

Doldrum laughed aloud.

"Why," he said, "this is just my luck! You know, I've just been wishing that I could get in with some good fellows this way. You know, it's the hardest thing in the world to find the right kind of a traveling-partner, and I've been traveling up and down the river for years, Winters, and I never had anybody. Of course, if you really want me to go down the river, I'd be glad to do it—but you see—you see, lately, late years, I haven't been used to—able to travel with a very heavy weekly expense——"

"Oh, cut that out! We got money enough to run a river-steamer if we wanted to!"

"I'll be glad to go!" Doldrum exclaimed, his eyes lighting up. "I'll give you fellows the time of your lives!"

CHAPTER II

PICTURES AND SOMETHING ELSE IS TOOK

ONCE more the two sportsmen went up-town to buy supplies, and pay for what they had ordered. They kept their hands in their pockets, their fists closed over their pocketbooks, and they viewed with suspicion all who approached them. Doldrum, the little man with large hands, walked up with them and, when they went into the store, he went on to get his outfit, for, as he said, he had been boarding in town for several days. He soon returned with a rifle-case, a suit-case, a raincoat and a pair of hip rubber-boots. As he walked down the street, the city marshal stopped him, and for a minute Doldrum talked violently, and the city marshal went his way and Doldrum his.

On board the launch, Doldrum tossed his duffel into his little stateroom, threw off his clothes and his straw hat, and soon emerged wearing an older suit of good quality, a gray flannel shirt, a cap and a pair of brown shoes.

"You know," he remarked to Calliper, "I knew that I'd have the time of my life on the river this year. I've felt it in my bones! We'll boil the river-eddies, clear to N' Orleans. No harm, you know, just a good innocent time. None of you drink, I suppose?"

"Oh, my, no! I am a theological student—er—I graduated last Spring, and this Winter I am resting after the six years' steady grind!"

"I see. I wanted to go to college, but I—I didn't!"

"Well, except for the professions, it may not always pay, except, of course, in the comfort of knowing things—the breadth of view."

"Yes. I think travel broadens a man a great deal. I've tried to make up in travel what I lacked in fundamental trainings."

"In many ways, traveling is far the best—experience, you know!"

Digitized by Google

"I've had my share of experience. Here come Mr. Coaner and Mr. Wattics. Are they preachers, too?"

"Oh, no! Wattics is son of Leopold Wattics, the wholesale grocer, and Will is heir of the Coaner estate—his uncle was Honorable George C. Coaner, you know; president of the Coaner Company."

"The shoemakers?"

"Yes."

"Well, the stuff 'll be here in a few minutes—darky and a push-cart."

"Eh? Got a list of what you ordered?" Doldrum asked.

"Why, yes. What's the matter?"

"Well, you can't trust these delivery-boys. If you don't look out, they'll steal half what you order. I'll tend to that, though!"

Doldrum ran up the bank and, when the darky came, he compelled him to add about a third more of the stuff than the boy intended to deliver, and saved his new-found friends two dollars' worth of goods, at least. With all ready, Doldrum took charge of the launch for the cutting loose. Standing at the wheel, Doldrum had Calliper cast off the bow-line, Coaner the stern-line, and Wattics started the engine.

In half a minute the boat was swinging out in the current, having moved out with as little fuss as a rowboat.

"That's the way to do it!" Calliper laughed. "We haven't made as quick and clean a departure since we started from St. Louis."

Doldrum patted him on the shoulder, with,

"In a month, you'll be doing stunts with this boat you never dreamed of doing. Wait 'll I show you the way down the chutes and up the St. Francis. You haven't begun to see the Mississippi River yet. How many times did you get aground above Cairo?"

"Why—ten or twelve—I've forgotten!"

"Well, no matter. There's a flock of geese going South. We'll have some great old shooting down on Yankee Bar—if I don't lose you before you get there!"

"I guess you won't. My! How that bank is caving there!"

"YES, and there's going to be a lot doing in this part of the river before many years! You see that graveyard over there? Well, that was four miles from the river a few years ago, and most of it is in the river now. The river's coming across that neck, and when it does, New Madrid 'll be on the prettiest lake you've ever seen, and the river 'll be twenty miles shorter, and New Madrid eight or ten miles from the river. That's Point Pleasant over there. You see that? That's the hardest sight on the river! The bank is caving away and that man is tearing down his house, so it won't follow his land into the river. He had two hundred acres of the richest cotton land, and now it's all gone except about twenty acres, and that won't last long. That's Point Pleasant Bar. A Pittsburgh coal-fleet struck there, and lost seventeen barges of coal. Behind that island's Tiptonville Landing, and four miles back is Reelfoot Lake—you've heard of that, I suppose?"

"Reelfoot Lake, Tennessee! Why, say, boys, we were going over to see that lake. Let's land in!"

"Good idea. It's the finest lake you ever saw, gentlemen, but a strange one. I'll stay and watch the boat, if you want me to—I've been there forty times; but perhaps I'd better go over with you. We can get some white boy to watch the boat, all right. You see, you mustn't leave your boat unguarded, day or night. You can't tell when some river-rat will jump aboard and drive it away!"

"What! Steal a boat?"

Doldrum chuckled, "As easy as picking your pockets, gentlemen!"

"But what'd they do with it? They couldn't hide it!"

"They've stolen steamboats on this old river! I guess it wouldn't bother some of the rascals to make away with a thirty-eight-foot gasoline-launch!"

"My land! I never had any idea it was such a wild country down here!"

"Get the lines ready. We'll land there by the float! Careful there! Back her! Now ease up—stop the engine! Land that line. That's the way! Make fast. Good!"

The launch landed-in with hardly a ripple between it and the Tiptonville float.

"You've been there before, haven't you!" Wattics applauded as he straightened up from the engine. "I didn't suppose a man could do that with a strange boat the first thing."

"Oh, I've handled lots of gasoline-boats in my time—lots and lots of them."

Digitized by Google

"Is that so? How's that?"

"Why, I dealt in them—launch-broker, you know."

"Sort of a side-line in the automobile business?"

"Yes — yes — side-line, that's it. Now we'll go over to the lake. Hey, there, you white boy—do you live here in Tiptonville?"

"Yassuh!"

"What's your name?"

"Abner Sotvel."

"Now say, Abner, if we stay here to-morrow, will you watch this boat to-morrow? We want to get to go to Reelfoot."

"Yassuh!"

"All right. Be here by nine o'clock."

"Yassuh!" and the boy grinned from ear to ear.

"We might sa'nter up-town — three cotton-gins here, and it's one of the prettiest little towns on the Mississippi. Lots of money here."

They all spruced up a bit and strolled up-town, the boy sitting on the float to watch the launch while they were gone. They walked over to the Memphis gin, and saw the cotton flying through the machines and pouring down in foaming waves into the compress. They talked to the buyers and then sauntered around to the post-office, where the three greenhorns sent post-cards to their homes down East. Everywhere they went, Doldrum gaily told them the sights.

They came to Shankle's photograph-tent, and Calliper cried,

"Let's all go in and have our pictures taken!"

Doldrum dodged, and held back.

"Come on," they urged. "We'd ought to have a picture of the party!"

Doldrum turned his head from right to left and back again, embarrassed, his eyes snapping.

"Really—really!" he gasped, "I—I'd rather—you see, I don't take a good picture—I—I—you see—it means bad luck when my picture is took."

"Don't take a good picture! Shucks! What do we care about looks? Let's have 'em took! They'll be mementos."

THE three gathered around their unwilling guest and gently urged him into the tent. They thought that he was embarrassed by lack of funds, and they didn't propose such a good fellow should be so embarrassed if they could help it. They ran him into the chair, and while two held his shoulders, one leaned over the top of his head, effectually framing him, while Photographer Shankle snapped three plates at them in different poses. Doldrum's expression was anything but happy.

"I haven't had my picture taken in seven years," he snapped, in exasperation. "Suppose somebody should see those pictures!"

However, as soon as the pictures were taken, he showed great interest in the photographers' art. He wanted to know all about the process, and Mr. Shankle showed him the dark room, the instrument and the pictures of the other customers.

"Here's the way I take care of exposed but not developed plates," he said. "I put the plate-holders right in that box there, and when I don't have many customers, I leave them in the plate-holders, because it is best not to handle the plates any more than I have to. But if I have a lot of customers, I have to take the exposed plates out of the holders and put them in that plate-box there. It is an awful trying business. You have to be so careful with everything."

"Have to work nights, I suppose?" Doldrum asked.

"Oh, no. I'll develop these plates to-morrow morning and then begin to make prints as soon as they are dry!"

"I see!" Doldrum's jaws set a trifle and he joined his friends, who had been waiting for him to get through.

"I like to ask about business," he said, "because sometimes I've thought I'd like to own a photographer-boat on the river, and get lots of poses. I could get lots of pictures down the river."

"Thought you didn't like photographs!"

"Oh, it's just a superstition of mine. I always have bad luck when my picture is took!"

"Pshaw! Superstitious!"

"Well, when you know the old Mississipp' as well as I do, you'll be superstitious. The darndest things happen down here!"

They all laughed. That night, Doldrum beat them all playing checkers and in the morning they went over to Reelfoot Lake to see the drowned forest, every tree its own headstone in the midst of the waters—a weird, gray, ghostly place, wonderful and

Digitized by Google

beautiful as the desert is beautiful. It was so attractive that the party remained there overnight, to see it by moonlight.

The following afternoon, they returned to Tiptonville, and stopped in at the photographer's shop.

"Gentlemen," he apologized, "I shore 'lowed teh have those pictures ready for you, but my plates is all mixed up. I must of got my exposed plates in the wrong box, 'ca'se when I developed them, they was blank plates. I cayn't tell what is the matter. Hit's so near dark I cayn't take a picture now, but if you-all 'll come up yere in the mornin', I'll shore take 'em right, yassuh!"

"That's too bad. We will come up in the morning," Doldrum remarked. "I was just telling the boys here, I always have bad luck when I have my picture took!"

They went on to the landing, and as his face came over the brink, where he could see the float, Doldrum gave a little yell of anger and surprise.

"Where's that launch?" he cried in the next breath.

From the wharf-house came a wail of despair.

"Somebody stoled hit!" the boy watchman wept.

"How that happen?" demanded Doldrum.

"Why, I stayed yere tell more 'n ten o'clock, an' then—an' then hit war gone nex' mornin', come sun-up!"

"Ain't that a go!" Doldrum exclaimed, his face so utterly disgusted that the other three victims had to laugh in spite of their dismay.

CHAPTER III

AFTER THE RIVER-PIRATE

THERE was no clue as to who had run away with the launch, but Doldrum was an old river-man and knew the ways of the river-pirates. He turned suddenly to look at the other boats at the float, and one of them was an open launch, double-chained to the quadruple-chained float.

"Who owns that?" he snapped at the boy who had left the cruiser unguarded during the important hours of the night.

"Barkens—the hotel-man."

"Wait a bit!" Doldrum said, turning and racing toward the hotel. In ten minutes he returned with the hotel-man, who carried a rifle, with a hamper of things to eat, borne between two darkies.

"I forgot I fixed the engine!" Doldrum exclaimed. "They can't run it. Got to float! We'll overtake 'em down below. Hustle aboard. They're thirty miles down and we can get after them. This'll be a warning, gentlemen. It's adventure number one, too."

They jumped aboard the launch, and in five minutes they were driving away down the river in the open water. The hotel-man's launch was old, but the engine was faithful, and it pounded along steadily, hour after hour, and at dusk, when things were dim on the surface, they landed-in for the night.

A canvas was spread over the top of the launch on green cane hoops, and a cozy little "rag-house" was made for the night. It was surprising to the greenhorns the way the two old-timers made things comfortable and, though they had expected to sit up all night in sleepless discomfort, they found themselves stretched out on the cushions on the seats or the bottom, covered with an old tent, sheltered by the wagon-tarpaulin that served as a roof.

When at last they went to sleep, they slept soundly, and were roused only when the river-men began to walk over them, getting breakfast ready on the little oil-stove.

At clear dawn, the cover came down, the old tent was folded up and stowed in a locker. Then away they went down the river, on the next to full speed, which would be less likely to put the engine out of commission.

"Good thing I plugged your launch's carbureter!" Doldrum snapped. "I just felt in my bones somebody else'd git that launch!"

Keeping to the mid-current, they plowed down the river and, in the afternoon, they saw the launch ahead of them, away down the reach, close to the caving bank on the east side.

"Get your guns ready!" Barkens said, and he loaded his own .30-30, while the others loaded their shotguns and rifle. "Here you, Doldrum, you take the wheel, and I'll get up forward there. Every one lie low—they've got guns, you bet!"

Digitized by Google

IN SILENCE, they bore down on the launch, which showed no signs of life till they came within half a mile, when a man could be seen in the cockpit, watching them with glasses. They had hardly made the man out when he sprang up and plunged over the side of the boat, and swam toward the bank. As he climbed up the bank, Barkens took two or three shots at him, but the man went over the bank, out of sight in the thick brake. Four minutes later, when the launch came alongside, they found there was no one on board.

Doldrum danced a jig on the stern and flapped his wings, while he crowed like a rooster. Then he sprang down into the cockpit, and found the engine half-dismantled by the river-pirate, who had been looking everywhere but the right place for the trouble—of course! For the motor was even more perverse toward pirates than toward common folks.

With his big, strong hands, and intimate knowledge of other men's motor-boats, Doldrum assembled the engine, took the plug out of the union between the gasoline-pipe and the carbureter and threw the fly-wheel over. She started as sweetly as a Baltimore oriole's song in the morning of a Spring.

"Away we go, gentlemen!" he chuckled and, swinging around, they started back up the river, the fine cruiser and the little open launch.

"What's the use of going back to Tiptonville?" Calliper asked, and they all laughed. There wasn't any use of it, and so they settled with Barkens, gave him some gasoline so he could make Tiptonville and, as he went on up-stream, they ran across to the eddy at the foot of a sand-bar and anchored, to take stock.

The river-pirate had done no damage, except to the cabin-lock, which he had filed off. Inside, he had feasted on the supplies and, from the quantity he had consumed, the three expressed their sorrow, for the man had evidently been hungry, and there is no sadder thought than that of men so little used to plenty to eat that, when they have a chance to eat, they gorge themselves. Doldrum, however, wasted no sympathy on the man. He peeked in and out over the boat. He looked at the filed lock and the empty fruit-cans and the other evidences of the lone river-pirate.

"What you looking for?" Wattics exclaimed. "Trying to Sherlock Holmes him?"

"I bet I know who did this job!" Doldrum answered. "You see, after you've been on the river a while, you get to know the work of those bad-men. Yessir. The fellow that done this job was Steve Bain. He's a slicker, he is. I been wondering what had become of him. Too bad we didn't shoot him easy. He's a bad, mean man, he is!"

Doldrum shivered apprehensively as he stared across the river at the wilderness in which the pirate had disappeared. Calliper searched the woods with the glasses, which the man had dropped when he sprang overboard. A moment later he uttered a low exclamation.

"There he is, fellows!"

The two got out their glasses, and Calliper handed his own glasses to Doldrum, who looked and saw, sitting on the bank, a man with his hands clasped across his shins, watching the launch. Though the pirate was nearly a mile away, the high-power glasses showed him clearly, watching them patiently. They could not make out the features of his face, but the figure was none the less impressive, watching, waiting; ominous in its silence. They could almost feel the sullen stare of the man they had outwitted.

"By Jove! That's a picture!" Wattics exclaimed. "What a country this is down here!"

"Yes!" Doldrum muttered, "I'd feel better if that man was dead!"

They all shivered, but there was no suggestion that they pull out and drop down the river. That would have been ridiculous—four men running away from the menace of one! Yet, when night fell, the man was still sitting there, not having stirred that they could see and, in the gloom of the darkness, they seemed to feel the shine of his eyes from the far side of the river, watching them with sullen hate, indifferent to the pangs of hunger, the raw chill of the night and the bitterness which is neither of the senses nor of the head, but of the soul itself.

It was Steve Bain, sure enough. Doldrum knew him only too well. Steve's two thumbs were creased around, where he had been strung up in Raklin Court by the sheriff one time, and Doldrum knew about

Digitized by Google

that. Steve Bain had no love for the sports who get a man into that kind of a fix, and as long as Doldrum and Bain were on the river, knowing the river as they did, the truce would last only as long as they did not happen to meet, and Bain was the aggressor, naturally, being the kind of a pirate he was.

Of course, the greenhorns did not know that they had motored into the realms of a river-feud—that they were floating gaily into the bosom of river-life and adventure as it is known to the River-People, and not to the casual tourist, who regards the shanty-boater as a curious specimen of vagabond humanity, rather than as a fellow-being and a brother. They had hardly even heard of shanty-boaters, and this was their first contact with river-pirates. They whispered among themselves how fortunate it was that they had happened to meet with a sportsman who was so familiar with the river that he could meet the emergencies with such sure and competent expedients. Who but a thoroughly posted river-man would, for instance, have thought of disabling a motor so that a pirate could not get away with it?

AFTER they had eaten their supper, they sat down around the table, and Doldrum told them stories of river-thieves he had met—of wild adventure on placid moonlight nights when the Arkansas frogs were whistling in the swamps, of floods in the Spring, of quicksands when the water was low. He told tales about Steve Bain and the gang that Steve had worked with, raiding the river-towns, stealing tons and tons of groceries and merchandise, selling the booty in store-boats down the river.

In a voice that fell almost to a whisper, he told of wicked men who roamed up and down the river, as Bain was doing now, waiting for chance to rob, and, if it was necessary, to do murder in order to get the booty or make a getaway.

The listeners had never heard of that phase of life on the Mississippi. They felt like explorers, like men who were going into the great unknown, and the fact that, only that afternoon, they had seen shots fired at a man, made thrills chase themselves along each back-bone. They shivered, and their friend laughed and chuckled and grinned, as he added to their fund of knowledge about the ways of the river.

But even his face lost its smile, and down his own back-bone raced little thrills of discomfort, when he came to tell of the things the Old River itself did, and of the shades and demons and spirits and souls that river-men said were abroad in the river, and on it, flying not only at night, but in the daytime as well, filling the hearts of men with weakness and their minds with reminiscences.

"Come outside, gentlemen!" Doldrum exclaimed. "Put out those lights, and I'll show you something!"

They had been laughing at his superstitions and tales of ghosts. Now they were delighted to see a practical experiment in these wild river-bottoms, that would tell whether there were ghosts walking the waters or not. They sat in their coats and sweaters, waiting for their eyes to grow accustomed to the gloom.

"The steamer *Sunshine* burned right opposite the foot of this eddy," Doldrum said. "There were ninety-one lives lost. Down at that point there, there was a shanty-boater fishing last Fall, a year ago. Somebody come along and shot him just at dusk one night, and stole his boat. Nobody ever would of known what become of him, but the river happened to be falling, and Scane Bailey happened to see the buzzards flocking down—um-m."

Across the water came a long, low, whimpering wail. It might have been a bird, or an animal, or a soul in distress, for all any of the listeners could tell. The quiet that followed was a relief. Then they heard the rhythmic wash of the river as a long wave came swashing along the edge of the eddy. When this had gone by they heard a fluttering overhead, as though huge birds were flying by, but when they looked up to see them, there was nothing in sight, and the pale stars flickered and wavered.

Far up the bend was a river-light, shining yellow in the night. Gradually, it drew their eyes and, as they looked, they saw it flicker and waver as the stars had done, though it was much brighter. They were surprised to see it almost disappear from sight, time and time again.

"What makes that light go out that way?" an awed voice asked.

"Shanty-boaters says its the steamboat and the murdered dead marchin' up an'

Digitized by Google

down!" Doldrum answered, his voice choking a little.

THERE was a little cackle of disbelief, but the wail of the unknown voice rose and fell again, quavering and lost in the gloom, upon which the listeners heard some one's teeth chattering.

"By Jove, Doldrum!" some one exclaimed with sudden realization, "you're the most entertaining man I ever knew!"

The answer was a low, sibilant, rattling laugh, then silence again, which lasted none could say just how long, but Doldrum interrupted it with the remark:

"It's pretty raw out here. I reckon you gentlemen have seen enough to know I ain't telling no lies when I say Old Mississipp's a plumb amusing and changeable river, eh?"

"That's so. By Jove! I wouldn't have missed this night for a thousand dollars; no siree!"

"Nor I—nor I!" the others echoed, and they went into the cabin, turned on the lights, which seemed blinding now, and made ready for the night.

Every one laughed when Calliper found he had all the watches, pocketbooks and penknives belonging to the rest of the party, excepting Doldrum's.

"You see, gentlemen!" Doldrum remarked dryly, "poetry is mixed some with cold facts, down Old Mississipp'!"

CHAPTER IV

THE *PHIZZ*

THE soda-water boat *Phizz* was moored at Hetecs Landing. In the old days the *Phizz* had been a whisky-boat, but when the Government made the laws, and the planters took to enforcing them, the *Phizz* became good and profitable. Old Man Quallam had died, and his daughter, Lillian Lotus Quallam, was conducting a strictly honest soda-water boat. There are soda-water boats on the Mississippi on which the right kind of a wink, and two fingers held horizontal, will make Uncle Sam's prohibition laws look like hammered china-ware, but not so the *Phizz*.

From end to end of the Lower River, every one knows Lillian Lotus, a buxom, brunette river-girl. Her dark eyes, her waving dark hair, her smooth, soft cheeks, were the delight of Old Man Quallam's customers, and many a river-man sought her hand, for she was not only very fine looking, but the heiress of no one knows how many gilt-edge stocks and bonds, fruit of half a century of profitable river liquor-traffic. Lillian Lotus never had liked the intoxicating-liquor business, and when at last her father was fined a thousand dollars and went to spend six months on the State Farm, she fired all the liquor overboard, substituted a soda-water fountain and, herself inaugurated the era of soda-water boats on the Mississippi. It nearly broke her father's heart, when he came back at last, to find the conditions changed so.

The idea of bubbling water taking the place of good red liquor on the *Phizz* had never dawned on him, and he faded away and died in less than two years after his daughter had proved the business was not only healthier, but much safer and more profitable—which was no argument for Old Man Quallam. He always declared that he had been in the Mississippi whisky-boat business because it was exciting and gratified his love of adventure. Perhaps this was so, for, except for the rum-business, his morals were good, and his daughter grew up to be "The River Angel," as they call her in the shanty-boat towns.

The *Phizz* was a thirty-foot boat, and it rowed like a skiff. The cabin was painted red, with white trimmings, and the hull was bright blue, with a red water-line. The soda-fountain was nickel-plated, and there were twenty-two bottles of flavors. Many and many a time, Miss Quallam emptied a tank at a plantation-landing, and she made money hand over fist, so to speak. She had just hooked up the second tank at Hetecs Landing, when a bedraggled man came down the bank, and shambled aboard the boat.

"Lady!" he began, pulling a lock of his hair—for he had no hat—"I'm hungry!"

Lillian Lotus looked at him with some scorn, but as she looked him over, pity came to her eyes.

"Poor devil!" she murmured softly.

"Yassum!" he almost sobbed. "I've had a hard, hard life—no home, no friends, no nothin' but swift kicks an' troubles an' sufferin's."

"Drink?"

"Yassum—soda-water!"

Digitized by Google

SHE laughed at his wit and, with a motion, made him sit down on the bow-gunwale, while she went to the living-apartments, where she had her mother make up a lunch for the unfortunate. While she was gone, he slipped from his seat and, sticking his head in the fountain cabin-doorway, he gave a swift, sharp look around, his eyes gleaming as they fell on the bright fountain. Then he slipped back to his place on the gunwale, and there he was sitting, forlorn and dull-eyed, when the good-hearted shanty-boat girl brought him a great lunch and a cup of hot coffee.

"What's your name?" she asked, as the man gulped the coffee down thirstily.

"Steve—Steve," he began, burying his nose in the cup again. "Stephens, Joshua Stephens."

"Stephens? You aren't a river-man. The only Stephens I know on the river is that fellow Watts Stephens who married Mrs. Cornes, and got killed by her husband year before last."

"I don't know him, lady!"

"You wouldn't, unless you were on the river. Where are you from?

"I come from Utica, ma'am, Utica, N. Y. I had a gasoline-la'nch, an' was comin' down the river, but I los' it."

"Is that so? Struck a snag?"

"No'm—stoled. A gang of fellers, river-pirates, attacked me an'—an' I had to jump ovehboard and swim ashore, and they took hit! It was all I had in the world—and I ain't nothin' left but my old pants!"

He wiped his eyes, and she nodded sympathetically.

"There's lots of bad, mean men on the river," she consoled him. "What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know, lady; I be'n—I be'n hopin' I could git work!"

She burst into a laugh.

"Oh, lawse!" she cried, "Steve Bain lookin' for work!"

The man started up, losing a mouthful of wild-turkey breast, which he had just bit into.

"Who the dev——"

"Oh, shucks, Steve Bain. You think you can fool Lillian Quallam? Ain't I knowed you ever senct I was so high! Those whiskers wouldn't fool nobody!"

Bain had the grace to grin sheepishly, and blush.

"You better blush, Steve Bain. You 'lowed you could work me thataway? Sho! What you take me for, anyhow?"

"For better or for worst, jes' as you say, ma'am!"

"Lawse, if you waren't so triflin' I'd shoot you for that, Steve Bain! You mind yo' words when you talk to me!"

"Yessum, but you said——"

"Tut!"

"Yessum!"

"What's that lie you said about having a launch?"

"Up theh to Tiptonville. There was four sports, and I happened to be there in Tiptonville. I hearn about them, and, after they went to Reelfoot, I got that launch, and then couldn't make the darned engine go. Bet it would go ten mile an hour. But I fussed over hit all day an' all night, an' they come with Barkens's tub, an' I had to jump ovehboard. They shot at me—see!"

He showed her where a bullet had creased his shoulder, cutting his shirt.

"Serves you well right, stealin' and lazyin' all the while! Why don' yo' brace up and be respectable?"

"Lawse! They ain' no spo't in that!"

"I s'pose they is in gittin' shot at an' starvin' an' that kind!"

"Yassum. No lady knows what spo't they is, rearin' round!"

"Shucks! Now what yo' goin' to do?"

"Res' a while, I reckon!"

She had to laugh again, though she was clearly exasperated at the trifling and no-account river-rat, whose whims were his laws, and whose rules of conduct were short cuts to other men's property.

"I reckon you 'lowed to steal this yere boat?"

"Not with your ma abo'd!"

"Lawse! I wouldn't want to do that myself!" the girl laughed at the thought.

Glancing up-stream, the river-man suddenly started to his feet.

"Theh's that la'nch o' mine!" he chuckled, half in exasperation. "I reckon I don' want to stay yere. Thankee for the snack!"

"That's all right, Steve. Here's a dollar. Now behave yourself!"

"Shucks! Me 'n' everybody don' agree on what is behavin'—that's what ails this ole world. Good-by. Them fellers is goin' to land-in, dod rat 'em!"

Digitized by Google

HE SLIPPED away over the levee and out of sight, while the girl watched the launch *Moonshine* round in to the landing. She saw only three men on board, and, as they landed against the bank, she heard one call into the cabin:

"That pain any better?"

"I'll be all right after a while!" a voice answered, a voice that sounded familiar, but which she could not place.

As she stood there on the bow, watching the launch and the almost awkward men tying in, throwing granny-knots on stakes and bumping the bank, unable to get out the gangplank, she was a striking sight to the three men, who, seeing the slight amused smile on her face, were not made any the more graceful or capable. That the pretty river-girl was laughing at them was clear, and if she had not been so very pretty, they would not have been half so confused.

When at last the launch was made fast, all three entered the cabin of the launch to recover their composure.

"I don't wonder Steve was plumb irritated losing that launch to such a passel of bankers as those fellers!" she mused. "Sech toe-stubbin' I never did see! Sho! I expect that other feller's seasick!"

CHAPTER V

THE PLUMB PEACEABLENESS OF HETECS

THE three Utica sportsmen sauntered over the levee to look at the town of Hetecs Landing. It was a very pretty town, which had given promise of large size in the old days, when the Hetecs Landing Railroad and the Hetecs Steamboat Company joined hands, but the boom had died out and now it was a placid, sleepy, contented little river-town, waiting for the caving bank to get it, or for a cut-off to leave it far back in the swamps; nobody cared much which, so long as something happened.

The three strangers made quite a commotion in Hetecs. Lots of times, a stranger had dropped in, and old inhabitants could remember when two strangers had been there together, or at least in the same week, or nearly the same week, anyway. But here were three all together, and sauntering along with wide-open eyes, giving Hetecs Landing the admiration that was its due.

"Plumb peaceable" hardly describes the serene beauty and composure of Hetecs Landing as the three men saw it, that afternoon. The sun shone softly through tawny clouds upon the yellowing leaves of the cypress on the outskirts of the village. Far across the dark purple plantation-fields flashed the white cotton as the pickers' bags were emptied into the wagon-boxes. It was so quiet that the booming voice of some darky buck quite permeated the atmosphere, and echoed through the silent streets, from house to house, and down the lane of brick store-buildings which formed the business quarter of the town. A large, almost fat man leaned against the awning-pole before the Emporium, picking a cotton-boll to pieces. He was the town marshal, Wifferly, ready to preserve peace. A team of three mules with reciprocating ears were plainly awaiting an opportunity to disturb the calm and serenity.

The three men were delighted. This was one of the things they had come two thousand miles to see—a sleepy little cotton-town. They sauntered up one street and down the next, and paused in front of the fine brick jail set up in the outskirts of the village, a hundred yards from the nearest house, in the shade of some ancient and honorable trees. They almost forgot to purchase supplies at the stores, but at last, in the dusk, with their arms full, they returned to the river and boarded their launch. They met Doldrum just started up the levee. He said he had recovered from the indisposition which had kept him from showing himself to Lillian Lotus Quallam and, now that it was dusk, he thought a stroll would do him good.

Before he left them, however, he advised that they move the launch to the upper eddy, a good quarter of a mile above the soda-water boat. The three demurred, but he mentioned the fearsome West Wind, and said that the upper eddy was far safer than the narrow lower one. With some satisfaction, he saw them move out, then went into the village, where, with his coat reversed and his hat askew, and his shoulders humped up, he ambled along, peering to right and left with sharp eyes.

The truth of the matter is, Doldrum was sick for excitement. The placid existence on the pretty launch troubled him, and he now joined the crowd in the post-office,

Digitized by Google

waiting for the stage to come in from the railroad, twenty miles away. He was such a little man, and his bearing and clothes were so unobtrusive, that not one person noticed him. He would have made an admirable detective "shadow," for, in his present mood, none would ever remember having seen him.

Suddenly, as the stage drew up, and every one crowded into the door, some one roared:

"I lost my watch!"

ALL the watch-owners present naturally felt for their watches, and another howl went up—the howl of a small mob. Worse yet, some one missed his pocketbook, and there was a scream—the anguished scream that only the loss of a hundred dollars can mean. Doldrum yelled with the rest—but not obtrusively. He went around to where the darkies' benches were located, feeling of his pockets, and lamenting in woful voice, for there had gone up a yell:

"Pocket-picks—pocket-picks! Don' let any man out till he's searched!"

One man recalled the fact of numerous pickpockets when the steamboat came in and moved from the upper to the lower landing, with numerous Hetecs Landing men on board.

The town marshal stood in the doorway, his gun drawn, and he forced every one to submit to search, regardless of high spirits or position in the community. They searched Doldrum among the rest, and he submitted with tearful lamentations, for his money was all gone, too.

There was some argument as to whether they hadn't better search the white men all over, for no one had ever heard of a darky pickpocket, but the marshal, suspicious that the darkies might have learned a new trick, ordered them lined up and searched. This was done by the postmaster and the village doctor.

They came to a Smart Aleck yellow man, and he turned ash color—but they found nothing in his pockets, not even his watch, whereat he reared right up. No darky had ever had his pocket picked before! But all the darkies had had their pockets picked, except one, and that was "Slow-Foot" Moan, a huge, slant-foreheaded, clumsy-handed, splash-eyed field-hand. In his pockets were watches, pocketbooks, half a hundred dollars in loose change, nine pocket-knives and two medallion photographs.

"For de Lawd!" Slow-Foot muttered, "If I'd 'a' knowed I had all dat, I'd 'a' bounded through the winder!"

"He never picked no pockets!" the doctor exclaimed, discrediting the evidence before his eyes on the counter. "Who give you that truck, Slow-Foot!"

"Gem'men!" the Smart Aleck exclaimed, taking off his pert straw hat, "that little feller right there——"

Doldrum turned and started to rush through the crowd, but the marshal seized him by the back of the coat, and a dozen hands seized him elsewhere. Doldrum was caught, and his eyes blinked with apprehension.

"Yassuh! He's a slick little cuss!" the marshal exclaimed, staring the man in the face, trying to place him. "I reckon I'll jes' tote him round to the lockup tell I can telephone to Brand, Chief Brand—he knows all these here slick crooks."

Without more ado, Marshal Wifferly forced Doldrum through the murmuring crowd, toward the street. Once in the street, he whispered in the prisoner's ear,

"We gotter hurry. Them fellers los' a lot of money on the packet las' week. Soon's I git yo' locked in, I'll sen' fer the sheriff an' hisn's deputies! Lawse! I shore hope they'll git yere in time! My lan'! I don' want to see nobody strung up!"

Once Doldrum pretended to slip, and tried to throw the marshal off, but the marshal was a big, strong man, and his grip was firm. In twenty minutes, Doldrum was locked in a cell, steel-lined and double-barred.

"Hit's good an' strong!" Wifferly said. "Hit'll take 'em quite a while to git through the outside do'!"

A minute later, the telephone-bell in the office tinkled, and Doldrum knew that the marshal was telephoning for the sheriff and his deputies to come and guard the jail, or steal the prisoner away.

Hetecs Landing was no longer quiet and peaceable. The murmuring around the post-office grew louder and louder as the men sorted out their possessions. The old darky, his eyes rolling and his thick blue lips drooping, continued to protest that he never had no such money before, nor so many watches and things belonging to white gentlemen, but no one paid any attention to him.

Digitized by Google

WHEN they had all gotten each his own things, and sundry slight difficulties as to exactly the proper division of the loose change had been settled, the low murmuring became a low roar, and, before long, the little mail crowd had increased to a little mob that was increasing steadily in size, as the unwonted disturbance brought men and youths from all sides. There were occasional yells, whoops and the barking of excited dogs. There were piping shrieks as small boys took up the cry.

The marshal ran hither and yon, seizing the coats of men he knew, remonstrating with them, begging them, arguing that it would disgrace the town, if "anything happened."

"They'll just whoop around an' yell a bit!" some told him, and then yelled with meaningless shouts themselves.

The storekeepers began to close their shops, two hours ahead of time, and put up the shutters. The mules in the stables down by the cotton-gin began to bray, and other mules, far and near, brayed and squealed and stomped. From out in the country came men on horseback, galloping and sweating, and when one came abreast another, he would cry out,

"Hearn the excitement? My lawse! Hetecs is jes' a-b'ilin'!"

Arriving in town, they tied their horses to the hitching-bars and joined the throng that surged on Main Street, asking men they knew what it was all about. When they heard, they yelled and whooped, and wondered what would happen. As yet, there was no one who shone more conspicuous than the rest, but suddenly a hatchet-faced little man, with leathery, wrinkled skin and long, bony hands, sprang up on a horse-block and piped a shrill scream that was more penetrating than any other one voice.

"Hol' on! Keep still! Shut up! Boils is gwine to speak!" voices urged. From the horse-block, stillness moved out to the edge of the crowd and even the mules beyond subsided to listen, lest they miss something, for they had yelled because the men yelled.

When all was silent, and not a sound came from the most distant plantation mule-stable, Boils rubbed his hands and began to speak:

"Gen'lemen: Las' Tuesday a week, I went down to the Upper Landin' an' abo'd the packet, peaceable, mindin' my own business, meanin' harm to nobody, 'lowin' to git a drink of, I may say, licker. An' when I got my drink, an' started to pay foh hit, my pocketbook was gone."

The crowd growled its angry sympathy.

"An', gen'lemen, I warn't the on'y one who lost hisn's pocketbook that night!"

"That's so, Brother Boils!" voices echoed; "I los' mine too!"

"An' theh I was, a gen'leman in a perdickament—the drink in me, an' no money to pay foh hit! Think of hit, gen'lemen! A debt of honoh, an' no money to pay foh hit! I say, gen'lemen, any feller as puts a man in that kin' of a place ain't no rights we's bound to respect."

"Tha's right!"

"An' I say, gen'lemen, when we gits a pocket-pick into ouh hands, hit's a despensation of Prov'dence an' a wahnin' to do ouh duty!"

"Hurray—Hurrah!"

"Hyar's a rope!" some one yelled, throwing a long line unwinding over the heads of the listeners, and the yelping barks of approval showed that the time of talk had passed, and the time to do business had arrived.

"Waugh — waugh — waugh!" the mob roared, and turned from the speaker, who, seeing his tongue's usefulness temporarily gone, sprang from the block, got hold of the end of the rope and, shoving and pushing, headed toward the jail street.

IN the meanwhile, at the Upper Landing the three sportsmen were calmly discussing the sweetness and calmness of Hetecs Landing. It was just such an ideal place as they had long dreamed of seeing. After eating a snack, they began to wonder when their guest and monitor would return, and one of them stepped to the door to look out. He was surprised and astonished to hear the low thunder of a mob. He recognized it instantly, in spite of the mules, for he had attended championship baseball-games, and had heard political meetings from afar, including a State Convention.

"Fellows!" he cried, "something doing up-town—there's a lot of yelling—let's go see!"

In two minutes they were headed up-town and, as they turned into Main Street,

Digitized by Google

they saw the mob marching around the corner down the street toward the jail.

"My gracious! A lynching!" Calliper cried. "What'll we do?"

"Go see it!" Wattics and Coaner cried in a breath and, turning down the parallel street, they raced toward the jail crossing, where they arrived ahead of the rope.

The jail square was well lighted. There was a cluster of lights over the door, and out at the street were four lights, all oil-lamps, but showing the mob as it came, with the rope held across the front of it by half a hundred eager hands.

The three men stood passive, shocked, unwilling to witness a tragedy, and yet feeling powerless in the face of the mob. They found their way, hardly realizing it, to the steps in front of the jail, and stood there in the glare of the lights, staring out into the gloom under the yard trees.

The mob, roaring, marched coldly and with slow tread right up to the foot of the steps, and then came to a stop, while there entered into the roar an uncertain, dying note. In two minutes, the yelling and howling subsided, and once more the braying of the mules quavered away in the distance. The three men standing there, unarmed, calm, and yet full of uncertainty, made the mob hesitate, and then pause.

Calliper, his face white, walked out on the broad side rails of the jail steps and, raising his forefinger, called out:

"Think well, gentlemen, before you do what you are about to do! Think of the disgrace that comes upon a place that has been the scene of lawless and unjust mob-rule! Think of the ——"

"Say, whar did you-all come from?" a voice interrupted.

"I am proud to say that I am a citizen of the Empire State——"

"Sho! I never hearn of that State befo'. Be you a Yank?"

"Yessir! I'm a Yankee—but better than that, I'm an American!"

"Now yer goin'! Hit 'er up, old hoss! Who-e-e!"

"I'm from New York, and I must say ——"

"'Lowed you was from the Empire State. Lookee hyar, Mr. Man, I say that no base and desperate Down Easter——"

"Hurrah! Now ye'r, talkin', Boils. Go it—go it!"

"Fair play thar!" some one shouted. "Let 'im have his say, thar! Fair play—fair play!"

Boils was shouted down, and Calliper was yelled on, and he talked of disgrace and pleaded—but he didn't know just what the matter was. He took a moment to whisper to Wattics, and Wattics drew Boils to one side and began to sound him as to just what the matter was. Boils didn't know exactly, he said, for he had been studying a law case when the trouble began, but he thought it was something about the leader of the steamboat-gang of the week before, who had robbed a lot of leading citizens, and the town marshal had found him——

The confab was interrupted by an impatient yell out in the mob:

"Quit yer jawin'! Le's finish this job!"

MARSHAL WIFFERLY came up out of the mob and, turning under the light, he reached toward his holster as he shouted,

"I'll kill the fust man that steps up them —them steps!"

The last words came uncertainly, as he hastily ran both hands around to his holster.

"Where's my gun!" he bellowed, exasperated. "Who took my gun?"

"Come on, boys!" a youth shouted, reaching into his hip pocket, as he started up the steps. He stopped at the second jump and began feeling hastily in all his pockets.

"Dod rat hit!" he gasped, ducking as he saw the marshal reaching for his own revolver, "Whar's my gun!"

Out in the crowd, where half a hundred had reached to draw their revolvers, there were short, sharp exclamations of surprise and muffled rage.

"Dod rat it!" a shrill voice wailed, "I los' my new gun!"

CHAPTER VI

THE GHOST OF A MOB

IN ALL the mob before Hetecs jail, not a dozen men could find their revolvers. Deep profanity went up on all sides, deep, doubtful, puzzled profanity. The rope fell to the ground while the men felt in their pockets for the missing firearms.

Men turned their faces from bystander

Digitized by Google

to bystander, hopelessly at loss to explain.

"Why, dod rat hit!" one man shouted, "I know I took that gun out the bureau-drawer!"

"I had mine in my pants!" another said.

"I never carried no empty holster!" roared the town marshal, startled to find himself disarmed.

"By ——, I know I had mine, but I'm goin' home to see!" some one ejaculated.

"So 'm I!" echoed others, as they shoved away from the jail, and scores were soon headed toward Main Street, still feeling their pistol-pockets, or their holsters, with one hand, while they tilted their hats up on the left side to paw their hair.

Here and there men were stooping over and examining the ground where they were standing, and moving to right and left, trying to remember where they had been standing just before, and these men went toward Main Street, striking matches and examining the ground, trying to find their precious revolvers.

"Mine was silver-plated an' hand-engraved!" a voice lamented, and another snapped,

"Mine wa'n't—I neveh had no use fo' any but blued barrels—that kind don' collect the light at night!"

AT LAST only the marshal, still feeling his pockets, the three sportsmen, who did not understand just what had happened, and Boils were left on the jail steps, and down the walk was a man softly swearing to himself as he edged away. In all directions through the town, lights flashed through the buildings, some mere flaring matches, as men went from room to room; others, lights of lamps, moving from room to room, too, and there were more mussed-up bureau-drawers in Hetecs Landing that night than ever before.

The three sportsmen moved away, too, and, as they started, they heard the town marshal utter a new and different tone of exclamation. He had found the jail door unlocked, with his bunch of keys hanging from the keyhole.

"Now, by donder! I left that jail locked," he shouted. "Don't that beat the ——!"

The three sportsmen did not go back to discuss the new phase of the night's adventures and mysteries. They glanced back, however, and they saw Attorney Boils with both his hands in the tops of his boots, reaching deeply.

"I don't—I can't just make out what it was all about, can you?" Calliper asked his friends.

"Why—why they were going to hang somebody, weren't they? I—you know—I wonder if this isn't some kind of a festival? I—you know—there's Mardi Gras—the New Orleans festival. What do you suppose——"

"Oh, well!" Wattics exclaimed, "we'll ask Doldrum—he'll know! He's been uptown all the evening. Probably he can tell what it means. My! I never would have believed such a quiet little town could get so stirred up in such a short time! Sh-h-h!"

They stopped and listened. Far-heard across the bottoms came the distant "yaw" of a braying mule, low, deep, jeering and final—some old-man mule sounding the requiem on the disturbance of the night. All the other mules respected his voice and, when the three climbed the levee at the river side, they stared out across the wide, luminous, rushing torrent, and unconsciously drew closer together as they felt the passing of the marching spirits to which Doldrum had introduced them.

There was a light on board their launch and, when they went aboard, they found Doldrum seated in an easy chair, reading one of the popular magazines.

"Why! Thought you were up-town?" Wattics exclaimed.

"Oh, I was," yawning politely; "but it's so dead, I waited till after the mail came in, and then came home!"

"So dead!" the three shouted, Calliper continuing, "They almost lynched a man!"

"Is that so—is that so—what happened?"

They all sat down and described the things they had seen and heard and done. Doldrum listened with interest and approval, smiling in a soft, mysterious way.

"You thought you saw and heard and did all that?" he chuckled. "That's one reason I wanted to land in here. This is the seventh of November, you know. Sixty-four years ago to-night, there was a mob started to hang a white man in that jail there and, just as they were going to string him up, he cursed them, and said they would never be able to find their pistols again. It's a funny tradition. I never

Digitized by Google

believed it, and I wondered if you'd see anything!"

"What—you say we were dreaming?" Wattics fairly shouted.

"Oh, no—not dreaming! You merely happened to dance attendance on one of our little Mississippi river-ghost stories. Now we hadn't better stay here any longer. Hetecs Landing is very sensitive about that mob-ghost story—don't like to have it witnessed by strangers, you know. A newspaper man came here five years ago to write it up—— Um-m—yes, we'd better pull right out, gentlemen! You've seen enough of Hetecs Landing for one night!"

Suiting his action to his words, he went out to the bank, cast off the lines and, on coming aboard, he drew in the gangplank.

"You'll find night traveling on the Mississippi very interesting," he told them. "It is a wonderful experience to drive down the current, picking up the Government lights in the bends."

"Why—why—why—" the three gasped, and Doldrum continued,

"Isn't this a wonderful river!"

Each of the three glanced uneasily over his shoulder, for in all their born days they had never thought to meet, and even in some measure subdue, a howling mob of hundreds. They were not unwilling to leave the place, whose sudden changes, whether spiritual, mental or physical, racked their nerves. As the launch swung softly out into the river-current, and the engine purred softly, they gathered in the cockpit, to stare doubtfully, but with increasing interest, at the dull outline of the bank and at the level top line of the great levee. All that they had ever read about the Mississippi bottoms, all that they had ever dreamed in childhood and in manhood about the land of the cypress-brakes, was true, and more.

DOLDRUM kept the engine going just enough to give steerage-way and, as the three glanced toward him from time to time, they saw his broad, square shoulders hump up characteristically from time to time, and once they heard him choking. When the launch was a hundred yards out in the current, Doldrum shut off the engine entirely and it floated along in the blackness of night, a blacker thing than the night—a shade in the shadows and as silent as the shadows.

It was a perfect night of its kind, with no stars, no wind, no sound and no light, except the far-away Government lights marking the channel. One could see only the shapes of the blackness; the sky's dark dome, the opacity of the black land, trees, levee contrasting with the sky, dark with dark, and underneath, the river, whose flow was like the everlasting rush of Time; felt, heard, seen and understood by the senses of the soul, though the senses of the body strained and grew weary, trying to compass them and understand them.

The three men, strangers to such experience, huddled together, for the wonder and the mystery of the Mississippi River crowded in upon them, making them uncomfortable, and yet they rejoiced and their minds hummed with exultation, for they were experiencing what they had dreamed of when they were romancing boys.

They yielded themselves to the improbabilities, to the very impossibilities, of adventure and sensation, staring ahead, then shrinking as they looked over their shoulders at the sound of a wave thrown with a soft splash that hissed against the side of their boat. From time to time they glanced uneasily at the strange little man who was conducting them down the river, introducing them nonchalantly to all manner of things, including whole mobs of undreamably realistic ghosts and hobgoblins—strange spirits that marched in armies up and down the surface of the river in awesome silence, and——

"Why, bless my soul," Calliper exclaimed, "I don't believe in ghosts! That was a real mob!"

His voice crashed in the darkness, and only Doldrum chuckled—a wet, raucous gurgle. Neither Wattics nor Coaner made answer to the theological student's thought.

Then, as if the Mississippi was unwilling that they should have time for reflection, or overmuch peace, out of the darkness came a wild and bitter scream—a woman's scream:

"Help! Help!"

TO BE CONTINUED

Digitized by Google

THE DEVIL

By Dwight L. Loughborough

UNDER a wide-spreading mahogany-tree Jack Spencer lay sprawling on the ground, just outside a nipa shack, across the plaza from the brigade headquarters. His black, curly hair, around the edges of which were thin streaks of silver, was ruffled like the mane of a lion. His feet were bare. His khaki trousers were rolled nearly to his knees, exposing the massive calves of him, on which the muscles stood out like strands of twisted steel rope. He was unshaven, dirty. His mouth was filled with tobacco, which he industriously masticated as he lay, half asleep, in the kindly shadows of the branches overhead.

"Spence!" called an orderly, and kicked the prostrate form by way of salutation. "General Carter wants you at headquarters. *Pronto, hombre!*"

Spencer yawned and rose slowly to his feet. A massive structure he was. In his bare feet he stood six feet five inches. He was broad of shoulders, deep of chest and narrow of girth and thigh. His lean face was as brown as a walnut.

The scout sat down languidly, after a minute, on the rude steps up which one climbed to the door of the shack, scratched his head and spat disgustedly on the ground. Then he pulled on his heavy cotton socks and brogans.

"More jungle-hikin'," he observed, as he laced his canvas leggings. Snatching up his campaign hat, buckling on his Colt's .45 and slinging his Krag carbine over his shoulder, he started after the orderly.

"The goo-goos broke through the lines the other night," the orderly observed, "while you was out in front. They chopped up nearly a whole company of the Thirteenth Minnesota, down near Guiguinto. Some fuss that, Spence!"

"That's no lie, pard!" Spencer nodded. "And we're up against it hard." He shook his massive head and punched a burly fist into an upturned palm. "Them brown devils ain't so easy licked as they might be."

"For the Lord's sake," boomed General Carter as the big scout entered the room where the brigade commander stood, whipping his off leg with a whalebone riding-stick. "I sent for you an hour ago. Where in——"

"Reckon a fellow has to sleep, some time or other. You ever sleep, Gen'ral?" Spencer was a civilian. He cared as little for military etiquette as a hog for a symphony.

"Spencer, I want you to locate Pablo Tecson. I've simply got to get him!" The General sat down in a big bamboo chair and continued to whip his off leg with the riding-stick.

"Ever look for a flea in a brown woolen shirt, Gen'ral?" Spencer asked, solemn-faced.

Digitized by Google

"I want you to find that Malay devil!" roared the brigade commander. Those who knew General Carter best did not mind his roaring. They loved him. He was a man's man and a soldier. Spencer adored him.

"And I'll find him, too, Gen'ral—if he's in Luzon. But it ain't going to be no Sunday-School picnic, as you might say. He's jus' like a flea in a brown woolen shirt, I tell yuh!"

The General lit a long black cigar and blew a cloud of smoke in the direction of the scout, who stood leaning against the corner of a large table in the center of the room, on which were spread several blue-prints.

"Major Bell has been beating the brush with the Fourth Cavalry," said the commander. "Colonel Funston has been whipping the swamps along our left; General Hale's troops have scurried through the thickets in front of him on our right, but——" The General got up out of his chair and began nervously to pace the floor. His teeth came together with a snap. He stuck out his chin.

"It is vitally important to the success of this campaign to locate Tecson at once. You understand?"

"I get yuh," Spencer answered, and picked a piece of tobacco from between his teeth with the nail of his little finger.

"Tecson, you understand," went on General Carter after a while, "is in command of this murderous outfit that has been breaking through our lines. I want to give him the scrap of his life." The General struck the table a sharp blow with his riding-stick. "You will take five men with you," he continued. "One, an engineer sergeant—a topographical map-maker."

"To —— with the maps!" Spencer ejaculated.

What Indian in the wilderness ever used a map to find his way through the forests? Spencer sniffed disdainfully. Why should white men, who are more intelligent than Indians, need a lot of cumbersome, nonsensical blue-prints?

"I'll probably start about dark?" Spencer observed interrogatively. "Reckon some of the Fourth Cavalry will be pluggin' around out there—along about to-morrow or so? Huh? Snortin' back and forth between our right and Gen'ral Hale's left, eh? Yuh might give 'em orders to keep a lookout for us, Gen'ral. Huh? We'll be there or thereabouts, I reckon. And like as not we'll scare up somethin'. A bunch of nice little goo-goos, like as not. And maybe we'll be fussin' 'em up considerable."

It was a strange speech for Spencer to make. Usually he accepted his orders without comment. But he could not help feeling somehow that—that—well, Tecson was a "mighty nifty little runt with a bolo."

General Carter knew Luzon. He hadn't forgotten Captain Grant, the artillery surgeon, who was slain and horribly mutilated near the reservoir the first day of the Filipino insurrection. He hadn't forgotten the two infantrymen—members of the Fifty-first Iowa Regiment—who were nailed to rude crosses in Cavite Viejo, with a sign fastened above their heads which read: "*Vivan los Americanos!*"

He hadn't forgotten the scores of atrocities perpetrated by the brown men who were fighting, as they declared, for *libertad*. He knew Pablo Tecson.

AND he was fond of this big scout, this mysterious nomad of the South Seas, who had dropped into camp one day just before the Second Division of the Eighth Army Corps moved northward from Caloocan and offered his services.

"Don't want to take on, nor nothin' like that, yuh understand," he had said to the brigade commander. "Jus' want to do my bit for Uncle Sam, y' understand."

"Who are you?"

"I ain't nobody in pa'tic'lar. Been stopping a spell down in the Solomons and around. Sort o' beachin' it."

"American?"

"Missourian," the stranger had replied laconically.

General Carter had put his hand on the big fellow's arm and swallowed several times, tugging at his black beard with his other hand. He pointed toward the open doorway.

"Get out of here, you!" he boomed. "Report to Captain Randolph for your detail." The General strode into another room, slamming the door behind him.

The scout stood irresolutely for a moment in the center of the big room. Then he swung out into the yard where, under the trees, a lot of half-naked brown boys were

Digitized by Google

quarreling over a game of chuck-luck and several Kansas infantrymen were playing poker on a blanket spread on the ground, using matches and cartridges for chips.

FROM out of Manila Bay the moon rose at the end of a beautiful twilight, like a ball of fire and streaked with blood. A gentle breeze blew in from beyond the peaks of Bataan, across the placid waters. From the swamps and rice-fields to the east came the sound of desultory firing. Sad-voiced bugles sang tattoo, then taps. And the scouting party under big Jack Spencer set out to hunt for "a flea in a brown woolen shirt."

Across dry rice-fields, through bogs and fens and foul morasses, through gurgling, crooning streams rushing to the sea, through fields of young maize, and bamboo-thickets which hid them like a cloud, the half-dozen Americans made their way.

Except for the lizards, which sang "pulk you, pulk you-u-u-u" in the tree-tops, the scouts did not come upon a living thing throughout the night, except once when Tom Harper, the engineer sergeant, stepped on a huge python, lying as stupid as if it just had smoked a pipe of chandoo—its belly full of bats and jungle-fowl.

Once they heard the hoarse, strange cry of a carabao as it wallowed in a mud-hole. Frequently they heard the dogs, made wild by the carnage of war, howling weirdly, like so many jackals, as they roamed over the shell-swept fields in search of food. Great bats whirred ghost-like through the air, and once they heard the cry of a child, which came to them across a barren field.

"There ain't a goo-goo in Bulacan," said one of the scouts, a brawny Montanan, as the men lay, just before daybreak, on a little knoll overlooking what had been a happy, prosperous village—as prosperous villages go in Luzon—but which now lay in heaps of ashes, charred timbers and crumbled stone.

"The Mormon artillery fire has sure put the fear of the Almighty in their hearts," observed another of the party, a Kansan.

"Yes," added Harper, the engineer sergeant, "and that naval gun on the armored car has been stirring things up a bit. We won't get a scrap out of Luna's bunch in this part of the country. They're hiking for the taller timber!"

"Ugh!" Spencer grunted, and bit off a great chunk from his black plug. "Don't you ginks get it into your noddles that old Foxy Grandpa Luna ain't around these diggin's close—with a picked army! He's no fool. He's jus' layin' low; sort of eggin' us on!"

"Rot!" ejaculated the Montanan. "I'll bet my next month's pay against the hole of a doughnut there ain't a fighting goo-goo this side of San Fernando. And the Lord only knows when we'll ever get that far up the track. Nothin' around these parts but old men and women and kids."

"I've got a little coffee here, fellows," Harper remarked about sunrise, as the scouts sat down on a grass-covered plot obscured by tall bamboo-trees and thick underbrush. "It will help out the hard bread and corned horse," he added.

They built a fire under a wide-spreading palm-tree in the caiñgin and brought water from a spring which bubbled out of the side of a little hill near an acacia-tree. Mess-cups served for coffee-pots.

SPENCER stood over the fire, holding his cup of steaming coffee in his hand, when a bullet crashed through the palm-leaves at his elbow. Then another, and another. A fourth bullet whizzed past his cheek, scorching it. Another bullet struck Harper's canteen. Others plunked into the ground on all sides of the scouts.

"Get out o' this!" shouted Spencer. He swung his Krag carbine off his back and released the safety catch.

Back among the bamboos the scouts lay prone, forming a sort of hollow square. No one knew whence came the enemy's fire. The bullets seemed to be coming from all directions. The popping of the bamboo as the bullets struck them was almost deafening.

A few seconds later a stocky, bare-footed Filipino stepped into the clearing in front of the camp-fire. He glanced at the evidence of the near presence of the Americans, pointed to the still waving reeds through which the scouts had sprung to cover and jumped back whence he came.

Spencer pressed the trigger of his carbine. There followed a sharp cry, then a babble of curses in Pampangan. More bullets crashed through the brush and trees. Mauser bullets. Mausers use smokeless

Digitized by Google

powder. The rifles "*gnack*" like the sound made by quickly removing one's tongue from the roof of one's mouth. The bullets "*cz-z-z-zip*."

One of the scouts was hit. He rolled over and lay with staring, sightless eyes.

The brown men closed in with fiendish yells. Another of the scouts, starting to rise, dropped down, rolled over and lay still. He was the brawny Montanan.

Spencer shoved the muzzle of his carbine against a lank figure clad in a blue cotton uniform and pulled the trigger. The figure threw up its arms and sank in a limp heap at Spencer's feet. Another defender of Filipino *libertad* swung a machete, but his arm fell at his side before he could strike the blow intended for Harper. Spencer had shot the bolt in the Krag and again had pressed the trigger.

For several minutes the four remaining scouts fought desperately. The foe outnumber them four or five to one. The encounter ended with the killing of still another of the Americans, the wounding of the Kansan who had said the Utah artillery had put the "fear of the Almighty" into the hearts of the Filipinos, and the capture of the other two.

SPENCER and Harper, the engineer sergeant, were bound together with strong strips of bamboo-bark and rawhide lashes. The wounded man was left, moaning piteously, beside the three dead. A Pampangan, with gaudy epaulets on his shoulders, kicked the man in his face, spat on him contemptuously and struck him across the top of his head with an antiquated saber.

Spencer strained at his lashes and cursed him hideously.

Surrounded by a dozen or more brown men, Spencer and Harper were marched along for several miles to a railroad, where a locomotive, coupled to a flat car loaded with railroad ties and iron, was standing on a siding.

The Filipinos ordered Spencer and Harper to mount a hand-car which stood in front of the locomotive. The brown men mounted the flat car. Four of them climbed on the pilot of the engine and covered the Americans with their rifles. One of them first had untied the hands of the captives, and they were told to start the hand-car.

"They're probably taking us just where we started out to go," Spencer told his companion. "We'll likely be taken before Pablo Tecson. But it won't do Gen'ral Carter no good!"

Harper, bending over the lever-bar on his side of the car, said nothing. But he looked up at Spencer.

"I know this country," he observed after a while. "I made a trip from Malolos to Angeles before the fun started. This is the Bag Bag river we are crossing now. A little yonder to the northeast is Bacolor. We're only a few miles from Malolos. General Luna is supposed to be at San Fernando. They'll try to take us there, or to Bacolor."

"Try!" echoed Spencer. "They'll do it. Then it'll be all over but the kneeling in front of a stone wall and the——" The locomotive was close behind.

"Up the track a little way, if I remember correctly," the engineer sergeant went on, "there is a sharp curve. On either side of the track is a dense growth of bamboo, banana-trees and sugar-cane—growing wild, of course. We might——"

"We'll try it! By ——, we'll try it!" Spencer exclaimed, and frantically began pumping the hand-car.

As the hand-car rounded the curve to which the sergeant had referred, Spencer stepped quickly to one side.

"Get ready!" he said, quietly, releasing his hold of the bar. The sergeant stepped to the edge at his end.

"Jump!" the big scout shouted.

A volley of Mauser bullets whistled over the heads of the Americans as they slid down the steep embankment and dashed into the thicket. The locomotive whistle shrieked and a score of howling Filipinos sprang out of the engine-cab and off the flat car, and darted after the escaping prisoners.

The chase soon was over. Spencer got away, but the engineer sergeant, because he fell over a fallen *teque*-tree, was captured and securely bound. A half-dozen Filipinos marched him to the flat car. On this he was lifted, none too gently, and the locomotive, with another wild shriek, moved on.

II

A FEW miles up the track they left the train and started into the interior, away from the railroad. With the muzzles of a couple of Mausers

Digitized by Google

poking into his ribs, Harper plodded along a narrow, winding road, under a sun so hot it would have melted Harveyized steel.

Several times—after his all-night "hike" and the brisk fight, marching without a drop of water with which to moisten his tongue—he seemed about to faint. But each time a Filipino poked a rifle threateningly into his ribs, and he staggered on.

The road snaked along between a swamp and a dense growth of bamboo, with here and there a coconut-palm or a *teque* rearing itself majestically.

At the end of the road—every road has an end, thank Heaven!—the party came to a large plantation house, surrounded by a stone wall which was surmounted by sharp iron pickets and pieces of broken bottles set in cement. There was a big iron gate in front of the house, with a sentry-box on either side. Over the gate waved the flag of the Philippine republic and a stand of regimental colors. It was the headquarters of Colonel Pablo Tecson, the most bloodthirsty of all Emilio Aguinaldo's bloodthirsty horde.

Tecson's code, like that of Luna and Pilar and Montenegro—and even that of Aguinaldo himself, for the matter of that—was to punch out a captive's eyes, cut off his nose, tear out his tongue and then finally end the festivities by cutting out the poor devil's heart and stuffing it into his mouth! Of course, by that time it wouldn't make much difference what they did with a fellow's heart.

As they passed through the gate, Harper raised his tired eyes. He saw the rebel chief sitting at an open window on the second floor of the big house. The Colonel of the fiercest guerrilla fighters in Luzon was grinning and rubbing his hands. He liked to have his men bring American prisoners to him. He delighted in American prisoners.

Harper frequently had seen Pablo Tecson in Manila before the outbreak. He was a prominent member of the Philippine Club and a member of the aristocracy of Philippine society in Manila.

It was said his mother was half Chinese and half Italian; that his father was half Tagalog, quarter Irish and quarter Spanish. A decided cosmopolitan was Pablo.

He had little glittering eyes, like a snake. His hands were long and skinny. His chin was sharp, as was his nose. His mouth was a thin line drawn across the lower part of his face—a long gash which opened wide when he talked, and exposed two rows of long yellow fangs. His lips were always stained with the crimson juice of the betel-nut, which he chewed incessantly. His face was wrinkled, pock-marked, repulsive.

"*Un Americano, Señor Commandante,*" announced the monkey-faced sergeant in charge of the party having the custody of the American as they entered the room where Tecson sat in a big armchair by the open window.

"A-a-ah!" sighed the Colonel in his satisfaction at having some one on whom to vent his hatred for the Caucasian race. He rose wearily and saluted the monkey-faced sergeant, who returned the awkward salute, as an Italian organ-grinder's monkey might acknowledge a contribution. A moment more and the American and the *diablo chiquito*—"little devil," as Tecson liked to call himself—stood face to face. They were alone in the room.

"IT IS with pleasure I greet you, señor," he said to Harper in a voice which reminded one of nothing so much as the rasping of a file on a dull saw-blade. He spoke in Spanish. He grinned. His black eyes glittered ominously. How he hated Americans!

For possibly five seconds the two men stood looking at each other squarely. The American was cool. He bore himself with the dignity of an American soldier. He was unafraid. The other stood chuckling and rubbing his hands. He appeared half weasel, half snake. Then he went on:

"You are—ah—let me see—what do they call it in your language? Ah, I have it! *A spy!* No?" He raised his eyebrows. Then he grinned again, more hideously than before, his yellow fangs exposed like those of a sniffing wild boar.

"Splendid, young man—and now you must die! No? It is sad. Very sad, señor." He shrugged his shoulders and lit a cigarette. "Once I heard your great general, Lloyd Wheaton, speak it the truth—'the fortunes of war.' That is it. No?" He sighed and exhaled a cloud of smoke through his distended nostrils.

"I am a scout, *Señor Commandante,*" the engineer answered.

"A-ah! A distinction without a difference."

Digitized by Google

"But there is a great difference!" Harper's eyes blazed and he shook his fist at the Filipino. "I wear a uniform. The international code of war——"

"Quite so; quite so," Pablo assented, with a nod and a shrug of his slanting shoulders. "But, unfortunately for *el Señor Americano*, our code of warfare in Luzon makes no such distinction. A-ah, it is very sad! And you so young. How young? Not twenty-five, surely?"

Harper threw back his broad shoulders and stood to his full height. His gray eyes flashed defiance. For half a minute he stood there, looking his disgust, his utter loathing of the creature before him in a gold-braided cotton uniform, quietly smoking a cigarette, and grinning.

"Has *Señor* any request to make before——"

"*Sil*" interrupted Harper. "Have me shot to-morrow morning, bright and early—before breakfast. Or I might get away! Go ahead with your killin'-bee and be damned to you!"

Pablo was taken aback. He started, then sat down and looked at the American through half-closed eyelids. He stuck his sharp chin into the palm of one long, skinny hand, the fingers of which were cigarette-stained, and rested his elbow on the arm of his chair. With the other hand he drummed nervously on the window sill. Then he grinned again.

"It shall be so," he said. "How glorious to die for one's country! One never is forgotten when one dies for one's flag. No?"

He called the monkey-faced sergeant, who had been standing just outside the door during the interview.

Harper was escorted down the broad stairs and into a dark, foul-smelling hole of a room to the left of the front entrance to the building. The place was inhabited by cockroaches, ants, lizards, rats in great numbers and big, noisome bats.

In Luzon the first floor generally is given over to such things, except that frequently great snakes — rat-eaters — are harbored there. Everybody lives up-stairs in Luzon. The reason is obvious.

There was an iron-barred window in the dungeon-like room about ten feet from the ground. It was covered with cobwebs. Harper sat down in a corner, where fell a beam of light from the now slowly sinking torrid sun. He pulled off one of his shoes and took out of it a long, very thin-handled knife with a single blade about five inches long. The monkey-faced sergeant had searched him carefully, but had failed to take off his shoes. That was a mistake.

Harper opened the knife and sat whetting the blade on the side of his shoe as he watched a great black-and-yellow spider suck the blood out of a dozen greenbottle flies in the cobwebs over the window. Then he slipped the knife, still open, into the right-hand pocket of his khaki trousers.

AFTER a while—the sun had gone down and twilight was falling—the sentry outside the dungeon opened the door and handed him a gourd filled with water.

"Will *Señor Americano* have a drink?" he asked in Spanish.

Harper clutched the gourd eagerly with both hands and gulped down some of its contents. He was almost famished. He had not had a drink of water since early that morning. The water was salty. It was foul. The American gagged, and dropped the gourd. The Filipino laughed raucously. He doubled over and slapped his leg with his free hand, his other hand carrying a Mauser rifle at a trail. Another soldier came up and the sentry spoke to him in Pampangan. Then the other soldier laughed. The door stood open.

Harper put his right hand into his trousers pocket. He crouched suddenly, as a panther crouches. Then he sprang forward. The long, thin blade was buried to the hilt in the left breast of the sentry.

Harper snatched up the Mauser and struck down the second Filipino soldier with the butt of it. Then he dashed for the entrance. A shot rang out, two shots, three. He jumped back and crouched down behind an ox-cart loaded with cases of ammunition which stood in the passageway.

From up-stairs he heard wild shouts, and another shot.

"*El diablo alto! El diablo alto!*" screamed a score of voices. "*Madre de Christo! El diablo alto!*"

Spanish and Pampangan mingled in hideous screams and curses.

Harper faced the stairway and pulled the trigger of the Mauser. The monkey-faced sergeant rolled to the bottom from near the top, and lay sprawling on his back, his

Digitized by Google

eyes staring up at the heavy beams of the ceiling. There was an ugly hole through the top of his head.

Another Filipino started down the stairs, helter-skelter, waving his arms like a raving maniac. When he reached the bottom step, Harper shot the bolt of the rifle and pulled the trigger. The brown man fell prone across the body of the monkey-faced sergeant.

Filipinos seemed to spring up out of the floor, out of every corner, and scamper thither and yon like rats deserting a sinking ship. Harper was nonplused. At first he thought the hue and cry had been raised on account of his manhandling of the sentry and his companion. But they were not after him! They disregarded his presence! They ran past him, with terror in their eyes. The yard was full of Filipinos, gesticulating, howling, like men distraught. Officers of every grade, from Colonel down to sublieutenant, scurried away in the gathering shadows of the fast-dying day.

The sentry at the front gate—it was he who had fired the first three shots—dropped his rifle and started to run. Harper thought it was too good a chance to miss. He took deliberate aim. The Mauser "*gnacked*" and the fleeing sentry turned a complete somersault and lay still.

After a few minutes Harper ventured into the yard. He crawled along behind the low bushes which bordered the broad gravel walk until he came to the big iron gate. Then he raised up and stood transfixed.

SLOWLY entering the gate from the highway was the strangest thing he ever had seen. It was shaped like a man. It was easily six feet and a half tall. Its arms were extended full-length on either side. It was naked—and black. Its eyes seemed hollow and rimmed round with blood. It swayed from side to side. It moaned and groaned.

"*Muerte á todos los filipinos!*" it kept saying in a sepulchral monotone, again and again.

"*Muerte á todos los filipinos! Muerte! Muerte!*"

Just inside the gate the thing stood for a full minute, waving its arms and moaning. Then it discovered Harper, and shouted in English:

"Don't point that gun at me, you blamed fool!"

Harper looked again and lowered his weapon.

"Well, I'm hornswaggled!" the engineer sergeant exclaimed, looking in amazement at the strange thing standing there.

"I'll bet them goo-goos are worse 'n that," the thing said, with a chuckle. "They'll be running until to-morrow night."

The thing picked up the rifle the sentry had dropped and laughed.

"Well, what do you think of that?"

Harper stood scratching his chin, his jaw dropped down.

"Better ask them goo-goos what they think of it," the thing remarked. "I'm goin' in and have a little *baña* for my hide's sake. This gumbo-mud don't feel good when it gets dry. Then I'm going to fuss around and dig up some *chow* and *tinto vino* for my stomach's sake. Come on; the fussin' will be right scrumptious."

The black thing started toward the *casa grande*, boldly striding up the path. Harper followed, keeping a sharp lookout for lurking Filipinos.

"You needn't worry, Tom," the big black thing assured him. "Every last one of them goo-goos, from Aggie down to the youngest bugler, believes in a personal devil. I'm that. Shed my duds down yonder in a swamp, rubbed gumbo-mud on me and put this here betel-nut juice around my eyes. Some masquerade-suit, eh? That fool sentry wasn't convinced right off the reel. He blazed away at me, pointblank, three times. Every bullet went over my head. That's what comes from shootin' from the hip—when yuh don't know how."

"But—but—Spence! Weren't you afraid they'd—" began Harper, marveling at the scout's audacity. It is one thing to fight with a rifle in one's hands. It is another to take advantage of a foe's supposed superstition, unarmed.

"Afraid o' what?" Spencer interrupted him. "You make me laugh. I'll bet you a bottle of Old Gover'ment against your dirty socks they ain't a goo-goo within five miles o' here—and they only seen me about five minutes ago. A mile a minute ain't bad for amatoors, is it?"

WHETHER Spencer would have won the proposed wager never has been determined. In any event no one put in an appearance at the *casa grande* that night nor the next morning, when,

Digitized by Google

several miles distant, Pablo Tecson's command—more than fifteen hundred men—met up with K Troop of the Fourth Cavalry under Major Bell. They became engaged in such a lively mix-up that the Fifty-first Iowa and First Nebraska Regiments had to be sent to the rescue of the cavalrymen, who had gone on a reconnaissance toward Guingua.

Two companies of the Twentieth Kansas Infantry came on the two scouts about noon, holding the fort at Pablo's deserted headquarters. Of course, as no one would believe the yarn about *El diablo alto*—"the tall devil"—neither Harper nor Spencer made mention of it, and so the story didn't get into the War Department records.

However, the five dead Filipinos on the premises were evidence conclusive of some sort of a scrap.

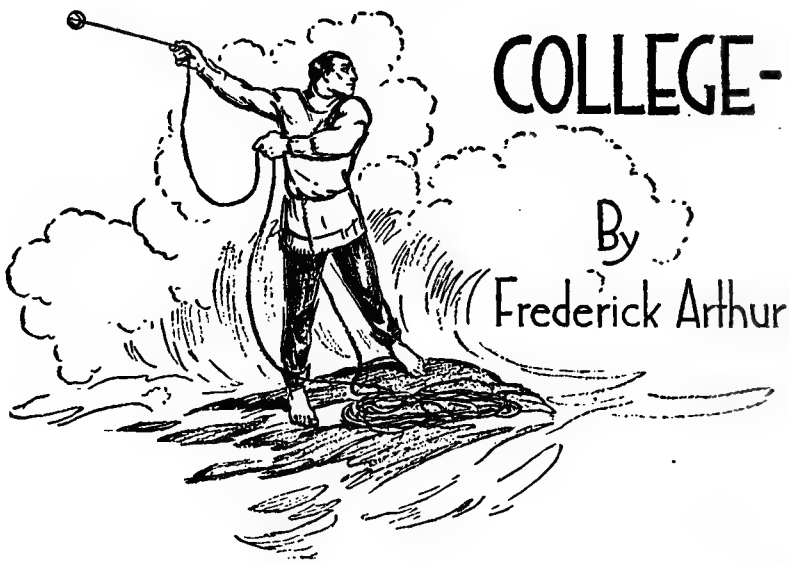
"Spencer!" shouted Major Bishop, commanding the skirmishers, to the big scout as he observed him, his loins wrapped about with a Malay woman's skirt.

Spencer saluted clumsily.

"Where are your pants?" Major Bishop asked.

"Got scared out of 'em, like as not," the Missourian replied, with a sheepish grin.

YALLER HEDGES, COLLEGE-MAN



By Frederick Arthur Dominy

"COLLEGE-MEN," replied Keeper Rorke MacLean of the Life-Saving Service decisively, "college-men are all right, Lieutenant. Takin' them as they run, 'thout gradin', I reckon the average'll keep up to it."

Which statement, I must confess, surprised me exceedingly. Most men who have never progressed beyond the three R's are prone to dislike those whose schooling has reached loftier altitudes.

"Possibly, Keeper," I said argumentatively—for I scented a story to come. "But the majority of the college-men I know run more to padded shoulders and loud hosiery than to gray matter."

"H'm," the keeper replied. "You never happened to run 'cross a feller by the name of Gail Hedges, did you? He's the one that made me change my opinion of college-men. Just to show you that the colleges don't breed all dudes, I'll tell you what he

Digitized by Google

did. Then see if you don't agree with me."

He proceeded with his yarn:

'TWAS at the beginnin' of the active season of '96 that I found at the last minute I was goin' to be one man shy in my crew.

There was nothin' to do but ship a sub, which, no doubt you know, is somethin' no keeper likes to do at the beginnin' of the year. It keeps things from startin' off smooth-like, havin' a greenhorn runnin' round, allers in your way, an' at a time when everything's confused an' muddled up, anyhow. But I ships one, an' then writes for the sup'entendent to send me the list of eligibles for section number three, which Ol' P'int station is located in.

By an' by it comes, an' darned if I didn't have to laugh, for there was just one name on it—Gail Hedges. Left me a lot of choice, didn't it! What made it worse, too, was that I couldn't find out anything 'bout the feller, though I 'phoned nigh the length of the beach, and I never did like to ship a man 'thout havin' some idea as to who an' what he was. There wasn't nothin' else to do, though, so I filled out the papers an' sent 'em in.

A day or so after I gets a letter from this Hedges, sayin' that he'd received notice that I'd shipped him, an' that he would report for duty at such an' such a time. Thanked me, an' so on, for givin' him the chance, an' altogether it sounded very nice. But 'twas so much better written an' worded than common that I got kinder 'spicious that, 'sides shippin' a surfman, I'd got a sea-lawyer in my crew, for, gen'ally speakin', I've noticed that them men that got hold of a little more education than ordinary are trouble-breeders when they lands in a station, grumblin' over their rights on this an' that, an' reelin' off whole sections of the Regulations to back 'em up.

When the day come, though, an' Hedges showed up as he'd said he would, I couldn't help but be pleased with his looks. Great, strappin' feller, he was. Six foot tall, weighin' mebbe a hundred an' ninety, an' not carryin' any fat, either.

"Ol' man," thinks I to myself, "mebbe you've struck it lucky, after all. There's beef for you, an' muscle, an' if there's any brains 'long with it, you've gone an' landed a man that'll just make play of swingin' a fourteen-foot oar, once he gets the knack."

I was consid'able more pleased, also, the next mornin', after we'd drilled with the Beebe-McLellan self-bailer. Took his place on the thwart where he belonged, Hedges did, an' though I watched him pretty close, ready to give a few pointers if necessary, there wa'n't a man in the boat who handled his oar any better, an' as you know yourself, Lieutenant, I never did have a crew who couldn't show with the best of them.

Strong too, he was. Strong as a bull. Why, when we run ashore an' started to get the boat on the wagon, I sings out for him to lift on the bow, meanin', of course, that that was his position an' for him to stan' ready an' help four an' five at the proper minute. 'Stead of waitin' as he should, though, or mebbe not knowin' what kind of a job he was tacklin', darned if he didn't get his shoulder under the stem of that surf-boat an' h'ist it plumb clear of the beach, so's we run the rear axle of the wagon under it with room to spare.

That's somethin' to do, now ain't it? Them self-bailers are heavy, heavy's lead, an' though I ain't no weaklin' myself, or for that matter neither is none of the crew, I don't think there's one of us could 'a' done it. Leastwise, none wanted to try.

Things went on fairly smooth-like for the first month or so, and Hedges never showed none of that sea-lawyer business that I'd been a bit afraid of. Fact is, he was nothin' more'n a big, good-natured boy, far as I could see, an' I couldn't 'a' found fault with him if I'd wanted to, 'cept on one thing. That was his slowness in pickin' up the drills, international code and resuscitation.

"Look here, Hedges," I said to him one day, when he'd been stumblin' 'long till I'd got tired of listenin' to him, "why on earth can't you 'member your part? Seems as if anybody most could 'a' learned it by this time."

"It's just 'cause I'm dumb, Cap'n," he answers, smilin'. "I never did have any head for books, an' if it hadn't been that I was lucky enough to have more muscle than the average, I'd never pulled through college. Athletics play a pretty prominent part there, you know, and I always figured that the professors gave me the best of it on examinations just because I helped out in the shot-putting and hammer-throwing contests at the different meets."

Digitized by Google

THAT settled it. Before, the crew had treated him pretty much as one of themselves, but now that he'd let out he was a college-man, it shifted things entirely. Course, we'd all noticed that he didn't murder the King's English like we did, an' was more particular with his clothes, an' collars, an' sech, but, even at that, we'd never 'spicioned him anything more, mebbe, than a feller who'd been clerkin, or somethin' of that sort, an' had somehow got through the examination. Now the men begun to call all his notions 'bout dress high-toned and stuck-up, and to make fun of his way of talkin'.

First, they did these things on the sly, kinder just gigglin' 'mong themselves, for Hedges certainly looked able, from the size of him, to make it mighty uncomfortable for any one if he took a notion to, but as the time went on, and he never showed that he noticed, or cared, for the mean little tricks they was playin' constant', they become bolder. Fin'ly, it got to a point where I was just 'bout ready to interfere, for they nagged him somethin' scandlous, but I held off, 'spectin' him to settle it himself.

As a rule, of course, Lieutenant, I don't 'prove of 'fightin' an' won't 'low any of it in my crew. But you know, well's I do, that sometimes a good, square, up-an'-down fight will clear up matters better 'n any orders from headquarters will. That was what I was waitin', an' to tell the truth kinder hopin' for. I'd took quite a fancy to Hedges, myself. I never see that he acted as if he thought himself better'n the rest of us, like a good many men who have more opportunities do. I would 'a' put in a word, only I knowed it would make matters a darn sight worse. 'Sides callin' him a "college dude," they'd tacked on somethin' like "keeper's pet," an' that would 'a' been the finish of anything like order and discipline.

So, as I said, I was hopin' he'd spunk up an' learn the crew a thing or two, an' one day I thought his time had come.

I was here in the office, though none of the men knowed it, as I'd been workin' on a boat over on the bayside all the mornin' an' had knocked off to get a little snooze 'fore dinner. I come in the station when all han's was busy in the boat-room, an' not a soul seen me. I'd just nicely dropped off when a voice louder'n common woke me up.

"You're a liar," it said, an' I knowed it was Sam Hicks talkin'. "You're a liar, an' a sneak, an' you've got a streak of yaller in you so wide you could drive a horse on it. Puttin' on airs an' tellin' me I don't know what I'm talkin' 'bout, you half-bred college pup. Take that, an' then, if you've got anything to say, or do, we'll go over in the holler behind the station."

I heard a smack, an' knowed, as well as if I'd seen it, that Sam had pasted Hedges an open-hander.

"Hm," says I to myself, "Sam allers was inclined to be mussy, an' mebbe I'd better interfere."

Then I thought again, though, an' made up my mind that now was the time for Hedges to settle things for good an' all. Even if he fought an' got licked, 'twould show that he had spunk, an' the men would certainly let up on him, an' if he licked Sam—why, that would bring things to an end, short an' sharp.

So I waited, 'spectin' every minute to hear the crew trampin' outer the station, but they didn't, an' after a bit I walked into the boat-room to see what was goin' on.

Dang it, Lieutenant, I never was more disappointed in a man in my life. There was Hedges, settin' on a fakin'-box, a great red spot on his face where Sam had hit him, an' cryin', yessir, cryin', for I could see the tears in the corners of his eyes as plain as I can see you now.

"Well, boys, what's the matter?" I asked innocent-like. "Ain't things goin' smooth?"

After a minute, some one growled, "Nothin 's the matter, Cap'n," an' they went on with their work.

But I wa'n't satisfied, so I asked direct: "Hedges, you look kinder queer. Had any trouble?"

"No, sir," he lies promptly, an' I could hear the men snickerin' 'hind my back. "No sir. I've got no complaint to make. I'd give a hundred, though——"

Then he stopped short an' looked at Sam in a way that'd made me feel uncomfortable if I'd been the one he was starin' at, but nothin' more would he say, an' so, lessen I'd wanted to let on I'd heard the muss—an' I didn't—I had to let things drop.

I never want to live in a station like Ol' P'int was that Winter again, Lieutenant.

Digitized by Google

Nothin' happened after the argument 'tween Hill an' Hedges that I could do anything 'bout, but somehow I felt like I was settin' on top of a red-hot stove all the time, an' when the *Europa* piled up on the p'int one thick night 'long toward the last of March I was almost glad, it givin' us somethin' to do 'sides loafin' 'round the station with Hedges—Yaller Hedges, the men called him now—sittin' off in one corner, never noticin' no one 'cept me, an' then only when it seemed as if he'd bust from lack of talkin' to a human bein'.

'TWAS a stiff pull we had that night. The sea was runnin' a good deal higher than usual, right plumb up to the beach hills, an' sometimes, since, I've wondered how we ever did get that beach apparatus over the three miles that lay 'tween the station and the wreck.

Nope. There wa'n't a chance to use the boat. No crew could 'a' got her off the beach through the surf, that was roarin' and breakin' clear from the outer bar to the shore, an' we didn't try it. It was breeches-buoy or nothin', an', lemme tell you, haulin' that cart wa'n't no child's play.

There was so many gullies, waist-deep with water, that we had to cross that I lost track of the number. There was long turnouts to make behind the beach hills, through loose sand ankle-deep, and there was times when all han's would have to turn to an' lift an' lug the cart over wreckage that lay in our road.

It was *work*, that's what it was, an' through it all there wa'n't a man who pulled harder or lifted stronger than Hedges. When I'd see the big muscles of his back swellin' under the tight-fittin' sweater he had on, and watch him strain till his lips closed in a thin, straight line, an' his arms were rigid as iron bars, I thought to myself: "If you only had the sand, you lubber! If only you'd stand up to the men when they poke fun at you an' fight 'em!"

Somehow it worried me, it did, this man who worked like a machine, an' with the strength of any two in his body, lettin' a crew cow an' bullyrag him so.

An even two hours it took us to get abreast of the steamer, an' then, just as we got where we could do somethin' toward helpin' them on her, comes an accident that made us helpless an' of no more account than if we'd stayed in the station. We was liftin' the Lyle gun from the cart when one of the men's feet slipped on a bunch of wet seaweed, an' down he went, lettin' go his side of the gun-carriage as he fell.

Course that made the others loose their balance an' all han's landed in a heap with the gun in the middle. No one had any idea there was any harm done, though, till we got together an' started to put the gun in position to load.

Then some one, Joe Davis I think it was, let out a holler, "The gun's busted," he yelled. "It's busted, an' we're all done."

Sure enough it *was* busted, an' there wa'n't no way for us to fix it, either. One of the pieces that's cast on the side of the barrel, an' holds it fast to the carriage, had snapped off, probably from strikin' a rock when we fell, an' that gun was worth to us, then, just what it would fetch for ol' brass, an' not a cent more.

Off on the bar laid the steamer, blowin' her whistle an' burnin' a flare on her for'ed deck, much as to say that help was wanted, an' wanted bad, right away.

We could see the seas breakin' against her an' throwin' their spray clean over her two stacks, an' we knew, by the way she was workin', that she's caught on the ridge of rocks that fringes the beach right there an' it was only the matter of an hour or so 'fore she'd break her back, an' bow an' stern would drop into the deep water on either side of the ridge. A nice fix we was in, wa'n't we? There we was, willin' an' anxious to help them poor devils, who'd never needed help more in their lives, an' not able to lift a hand.

Course, soon's I'd found out our gun was useless, I'd sent a man back to the station to 'phone Nags Head an' tell 'em to come a runnin' with their gun, but, from the trip we'd had, I knowed that it would take them a good four or five hours to cover seven miles, four from their station to ours, an' three more to the wreck, an' she was almost sure to break up long 'fore they ever reached us.

Meantime, though, seein' that there was nothing much we could do but wait an' hope for the best, we'd turned to an' built up a rousin' fire out of driftwood, so's to let them on the steamer know we was standin' by, an' got all the gear overhauled ready for use the minute a gun was on hand. While I was helpin' with this, absent-minded-like, I happened to notice that

Digitized by Google

Hedges was missin', also Lem White, an' I saw, too, that a fakin'-box had been upset an' the line taken off the pins. "Hey, Walt," I yells to Number Two, whose job it was to look after the shot-lines, "where's that number-seven line gone to, an' where's Hedges an' White?"

"What's that, Cap'n?" he asks, astonished-like. "Shot-line gone?"

"Yes," I snapped. "A shot-line's gone, an' so's two of the crew. What's the matter with the rest of you? Let a couple of men walk off with a line right from under your noses? Spread out now an' find 'em. I dunno what devilment they're up to, but anyhow, I'll give 'em to understand that I'm boss here, an' no one is 'sposed to leave, or take any of the gear, lessen I tell 'em."

A MINUTE or so afterward I hears a shout, an' then see Hill standin' on the edge of the surf, pointin' out toward the wreck. It was 'most as light as day, 'tween the big fire we had goin' on shore an' the flare they were burnin' on the steamer, an' it wa'n't long 'fore I saw what had 'tracted Hill's attention. It was a man swimmin', darned if it wa'n't, an' somehow I knowed it was Hedges. Then I looks for White an' fin'ly sees him, a piece down the shore an' right in the shadow of a heap of rocks, makin' motions as if he was payin' out a line. It took me 'bout three jumps to reach him, an' right away I see through, or I thought I did, the scheme them two crazy fools had hatched. He was payin' out a line, the missin' shot-line, sure enough, an' it was plain that Hedges was swimmin' toward the steamer with the other end of it.

"Stop it," I yelled. "Stop it an' haul ashore 'fore that man gets drowned. Haul ashore, an' do it quick. What the devil do you fellers think you're doin'? Hedges committin' suicide, an' you helpin'?"

"Hold on, Cap'n," he says, as I reached for the line. "Wait a minute. Hedges ain't tryin' to swim to the steamer. Wait a minute an' give him a chance."

"Give him ——!" I growls. "Lemme have that line."

He backed off, though, an' 'fore I could grab it, it slackened up. Then I see Hedges standin' on a big rock, with its top awash, that lay two-thirds of the way from the shore to the steamer.

"An' that's as far as he'll get," I says, half-way to myself. "There ain't a man livin' can swim the rest of it."

To tell the truth, there wa'n't a man in my crew, or anywhere else that I knowed of, that could 'a' swum from the shore out to the rock Hedges was on, 'cept him, an' I was mad at his takin' such a foolish risk, all for nothin'.

There was 'bout a couple of hundred feet left, from the rock on out to the steamer; an', though the first part had been bad enough, that was somethin' awful, a reg'ler b'ilin' pool lashed into devilishness, full of cross-currents an' undertows, an' spotted here an' there with p'inted rocks that just showed their tops in the hollers of the seas.

No man in his senses would ever undertake to swim it, an' I was 'spectin', every minute, to see Hedges signal he was comin' ashore.

But White was actin' busy again, 'bout this time, so I turned to watch him.

He was bendin' the half of a shot, that I 'membered seein' in the tool-box on the cart, to the line and, when he'd made it fast, he swung a hand an' Hedges hauled away on it.

"What's that for?" I wanted to know, an' then he explained the plan they had hatched up—though I guess he'd had little hand in it—an' I listened.

Somehow it didn't sound so foolish, after all, an' so, there bein' no good in stoppin' it, now things had gone so far, I says nothin', but goes down to the edge of the surf an' watches Hedges, out on that rock. The rest of the crew were every bit as interested as me.

Yessir. It was two hundred feet, if it was an inch, from where Hedges stood, with the water swoshin' 'round his feet, to the steamer, an' while I was willin' to let him try his scheme, seein' that he didn't intend to do no more swimmin', it seemed plumb impossible for any man to heave that busted shot aboard her, an' we never 'spected nor 'spicioned that he'd come anywhere near it.

He throwed, an' holy mackerel, Lieutenant, I never knowed a man could have so much power in his arms. As if it had been fired from the gun, that shot whizzed out over the water, the line stringin' out behind it like the tail of a comet, an' I held my breath as it went on an' on, seemin' sure to reach the wreck It was a big throw, a

Digitized by Google

monstrous throw, but—an' I fairly cussed—it didn't reach.

No, sir. It didn't reach, an' the little hope that had arose now died out.

"What's the use?" I thought to myself. "Hedges has done more now than any one could 'spect of him, but he's got his limit of strength, like any other man, an' he's played right up to it."

Then I looked an' saw him swingin' the shot 'round his head again. Out over the break it flew, when he let go, but I never had the heart to foller its course. It was impossible, plumb impossible, I was certain, an' what was the good of watchin', only to be disappointed?

Almost as I turned my head away, though, some one said—an' it sounded like a prayer of thanks—"My God! He's done it! He's done it!" an' in another instant the steamer's whistle blowed, an' I knowed then that the line was aboard.

As this yarn of mine is about a man, an' not a wreck, there's no need of my wastin' your time or mine, Lieutenant, describin' what we did in the next two hours. We landed every soul 'board that steamer, with the breeches-buoy, of course, an' had the biggest part of 'em up to the station, gettin' warm an' dry, 'fore the Nags Head crew hove in sight.

Hedges, though, was the man who really saved their lives, for it wa'n't ten minutes after the last man had been hauled ashore from the *Europa* 'fore she broke in two an' slid off the reef, a total loss, an' carryin' the biggest part of our hawser with her, too. 'Twas right after this happened that Hedges disappeared, an' when I inquired one of the men told me he had seen him headin' down the beach toward Ditch Plain.

"Funny," I thought, "but I guess he was afraid of meetin' that bunch off the steamer. It's a'mighty embarrassin' to have a crowd 'round you, cryin', an' all worked up, an' tryin' to thank you for savin' them."

I guessed right, too, for when I got back to Ol' P'int I called Ditch Plain an' he was there, sure enough. Said he'd stay till mornin' if I didn't care, an' told his reason, which was as I thought.

After this things went a good deal smoother. Sometimes one of the men would forget himself, an' yell out, "Yaller," but then he'd get red in the face an' try to 'pologize, though Hedges didn't 'pear to pay any 'tention to the man or 'pology more'n if he couldn't hear, an' I could see that his feelin's had been hurt, an' hurt bad—nothin' that would wear off in a couple of weeks, or months, either. But fin'ly things worked themselves out after a fashion. All han's treated Hedges decent, but didn't 'tempt to do any talkin' with him, an' the only one he ever opened his mouth to, outside of really necessary talk, in drills an' so on, was me, an' at that I was never 'fraid of gettin' bored listenin' to him.

THEN the last day of the active season come along, an' the last patrol goes out an' comes in at midnight. The next mornin' 'fore any of the men had left for the mainland, Hedges comes into my office an' shuts the door behind him.

"Cap'n," he says, "there's a few things need explaining, but first I want to tell you that you will have to get another surfman with the beginning of next season, as I don't expect to come back."

"That so? Well now, Hedges, I'm sorry you an' the rest of the crew didn't get along any——"

But he stopped me, 'fore I'd got out all I started to say.

"Ever heard of Jonathan Hedges, Cap'n?" he asked, an' I told him I had, for I guess there ain't a man, woman, or child who hadn't heard the name of the owner of the biggest department store in the United States.

"Well, I'm his son," he went on, "and to make matters clear to you, for I don't doubt but what you'll think it's queer, my working on the beach for seventy-five dollars a month, I'll tell you a little story. In the first place, Cap'n, I'm a college-man, and not ashamed of it, and secondly, I am, or was, a rattle-headed fool, and am ashamed of that. When I graduated, father wanted me to learn the business, and gave me a good position in the store, with a salary that was enough, more than enough, if I'd had the sense to know it, to keep me going in fine shape. There were two things the matter, though, Cap'n. One was that I had a temper I couldn't or wouldn't control, and the other, my lack of knowledge of the value of money. I hadn't been in the store a week before I'd had a fight with a floorwalker and a doorman, making a holy show

Digitized by Google

of myself, for there were hundreds of shoppers in the aisles on both occasions, and of course the old gentleman called me down thoroughly, and in a manner I certainly deserved, for my outrageous conduct.

"I began traveling with a mighty fast crowd about that time, too, and soon found myself head over heels in debt, and this came to father's ears also. Then there was a showdown, with the result that I found myself promised to do what seemed to be the impossible. In the first place, I was to report at the end of a year and show five hundred dollars that I had earned and saved, no borrowing, or anything like that, you understand. Secondly, I was to be prepared to give my word that in that time I had not come to blows with any one, no matter what the provocation. That's about all, Cap'n. I was lucky enough to know about the Life-Saving Service and pass the examination, and now I've nearer six than five hundred in the bank over at Bayside, and can also say that I've had no part in any fistic arguments for the past twelve months. That trial year of mine was up yesterday, though, and before I report to the governor I've a little duty to perform."

He smiled queer-like, now, but, 'fore I could ask him what the particular duty was, he said: "That hollow over there, Cap'n, just beyond the drill-pole—is it Government land?"

I tells him no, then he laughs, an' says: "Then it's out of your jurisdiction, isn't it? That's fine, because I want you to see without interfering. In about ten minutes, Cap'n, suppose you go up in the lookout and point the glass over that way. I'll promise you some real, genuine amusement."

WITH that he bolts out of the office, 'fore I could say a word, an' then I hears him say to the men—all han's was sittin' in the messroom, kinder talkin' things over 'fore leavin' the station—"Boys," he says, "I've got a little something to say to you, and if you'll all come over in the hollow, I'll be obliged."

That was all, but they follered him out, right away, an' as for me, I was just curious enough to run up in the lookout-tower.

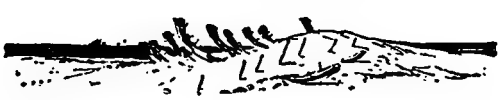
Course, from where I was, I couldn't hear a word of what was said when the crew gathered 'round Hedges over there, just the other side of the practise-grounds, but what I saw kinder explained itself.

Startin' with Number One, Bill Carter, Hedges says somethin' to him, an' then reaches out an' smacks him 'longside the head.

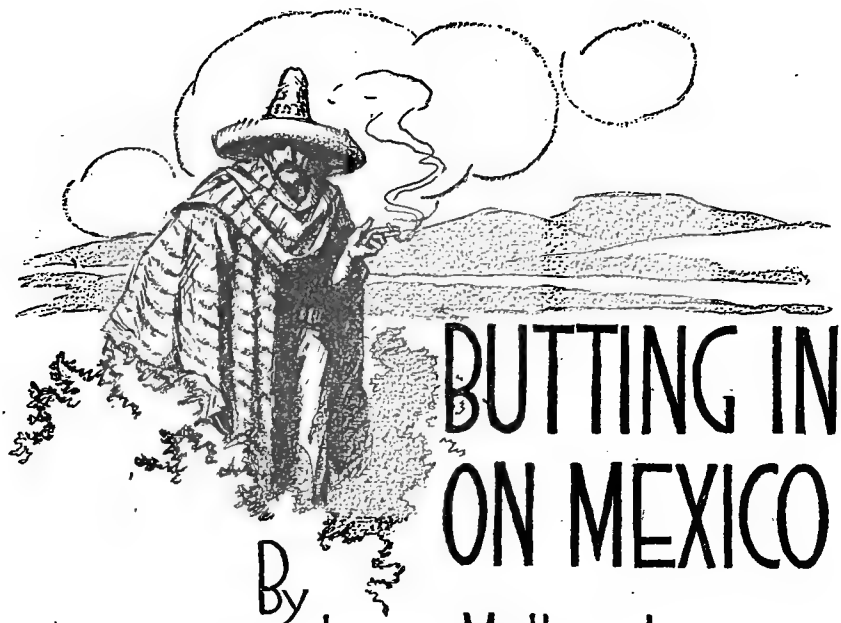
That was all was necessary, cause Bill swings back at Hedges immediate, an' then they has it, hot an' heavy, while it lasted. 'Twasn't long, though, for Hedges outclassed Bill two to one, an' the fust thing I knowed there was as nicely a licked Number One Surfman lyin' down on the sand as ever you see.

Then came Walt's turn, he bein' Number Two, an' Hedges seemin' bent on doin' the affair in reg'ler order. That wa'n't no fight at all. Walt was scared, I see that plain enough, an' glad to be let off with no more'n he got, but say, when Sam Hill squared off to Hedges, there was a real, reg'ler scrap. Hill was pretty good, there ain't no denyin' it, an' for a minute it looked as if it was even bettin', but Lor', it needed a welt or two like Sam give Hedges to make him fight. He must 'a' got mad then, an' poor ol' Sam had to pay for it—an' he did, good an' plenty! There's no doubt, too, but what Hedges remembered how Sam called him a "liar" an' so on, an' he got square for every word of it.

Lickin' Sam, though, ended the exhibition, for White an' Davis showed plain enough they didn't want to fight, an' Hedges didn't 'pear to care much anyhow. Three nice, fancy wallopin's dealt out liberal-like, goes a long way toward payin' off ol' scores an' convincin' certain persons that college-men ain't all dudes an' walkin' clothes-hangers, not to mention bein' cowards an' yaller!



Digitized by Google



BUTTING IN ON MEXICO

By James Mullins, Jr.

THIS is the story of an adventure. It happened on the Southwest border. Down where the sluggish, muddy stream of the Rio Grande del Norte flows between sandbanks fringed with gray-green clumps of mesquite and stunted oak, and separates the Lone Star State from the Republic of Mexico—that fevered land of revolutions, volcanoes and *chili con carne*, which is colored a bright interesting red on the latest maps instead of the meek pink of old-time geographies.

It is, as I say, a tale of adventure. It concerns silver spurs and sombreros and Winchesters and glinting cartridges. It is replete with the excitement and dangers of midnight marches and surprises. And, as such, I suppose it should boast a hero, a dashing daredevil sort of person, done in Anthony Hope's best style, made up-to-date and removed from the forest of Zenda to the banks of the Rio Grande.

But it doesn't. Nary a hero does it boast. I was the one to whom the adventure happened. And I would not place myself before you as a hero, nay, I would go even farther and frankly admit that I was never never intended to be one.

A COLLEGE ADVENTURER

I WAS (if you will condone this brief but necessary description) what George Ade would call just a common, average sort of a regular college-man. Not common, you say, learned professor? Very well, then, prof., old boy, not common. But surely not unusual. Football was my one best study. I always received good marks in football. (I have some of them yet.) I was also well up in the moods of Billie Burke, the number and gender of musical-comedy choruses, the case—but no, this has gone far enough! And far enough, too, in a different sense when I add that I could pass any quiz on haberdashery and the brands of cigarettes, and that I never could prefer a dead language to a live time.

Far enough—it is hardly necessary to state that when December and exam. week came to Dartford, I found upon my desk, one morning, a note from the faculty which, translated into plain English, announced that I was canned for the rest of the term. So were my college-days for that year ended.

And, too, so was the way opened for me to become a temporary adventurer—if such a thing can be—for now there was plainly

Digitized by Google

nothing to do but see the world, journey in strange lands; experience thrilling adventures until next Autumn.

So I packed my traveling-bag and, taking down my carbine in its worn case from the wall, I started out in search of excitement. And after many weary, devious twists and turns, the trail of my wanderings led at last to the borderland of adventure.

ONE bright, hot, sunshiny day in April I found myself in the Plaza of the border town of El Paso. I had arrived that morning and, seeking the Plaza as one seeks an oasis in the midst of a desert, had sprawled upon a shaded, green-painted bench next to that of a very surly old ranchman, in a wide-brimmed soft hat. I lighted a comfortable cigarette. It was an ideal spot for calm reflection. Picturesque Mexicans, Texans, and visions fair in dazzling white from parasols to tips of dainty slippers, idled along the walks. Overhead, the thick-leaved dwarf trees formed a barrier which the sun's broiling rays could not penetrate. All about were cool green lawns and, in an open spot, a joyous laughing fountain—the only energetic thing in sight—sparkled in the sunlight.

As I sat in the cool shade, I thought lazily of the disturbance in progress in the old republic across the river, for, when the train drew in, I had caught my first glimpse of Mexico.

It lay to the west, beyond the broad sandy bed and sluggish stream of the Rio Grande. On the far bank nestled the white walls and green trees and red roofs of the Mexican town of Juarez. Beyond the town, rolling, gray sand-wastes stretched away to where, purple with distance, rose a long, irregular mountain range—the highlands of Chihuahua.

Somewhere, I thought, 'way up among those hills, was Señor Madero and his band of bravos, or whatever they called 'em; the energetic Señor Madero and his revoltosos, revolting the best they knew how against the old Dictator. I only wished that they would revolt a little nearer, so that a fellow could get to them. That was the way it had been ever since I had left college—whenever anything exciting happened, it happened elsewhere. Fortune would never smile on me, it seemed, so I resigned myself to peace and my cigarette.

NEWS FROM MADERO

OF A sudden, a shrill hubbub rose in the morning air. Then a swarm of small brown newsboys appeared and scattered through the plaza, waving red "extras" and howling "terrible battle!" at the tops of their voices. I beckoned to a Mexican urchin and bought a copy. "It must be a whopper," I thought, and looked below the lurid headlines of "Big Battle!" for the casualty list.

It certainly was a "whopper"—the casualty list totaled six!

Now, the old ranchman on the next bench began to speak and it became evident that he had bought other "extras."

"Wouldn't that beat a cross-eyed pinto!" he announced. "Callin' that measly, little, greaser rumpus a battle and sendin' that locoed orphan-asylum out heah to rob the unsuspectin' stranger of his hard-earned nickel? When I buy a paper to read about a battle, I want to read about a battle, and no —— measly skuhmish!"

I returned to the offending sheet, and on the instant forgot everything but the bold, black letters on the page before me.

"Madero at Bauche, not fifteen miles from Juarez," they said.

The insurrectos only fifteen miles away, and I had thought them a hundred! Just fifteen miles from a real adventure at last; why, it sounded too good to be true!

I searched the page for further news, and I found it—an item on the "Insurrecto Hospital." The very place, I thought. There they would know all about the ways and means of getting to Madero.

I rose, smoothed out my clothes and paused, one of a delighted audience, as the old Texan concluded his protest:

"When you buy a Sunday newspaper," he was saying, "you are sure to find where the mule Maude lams the stars out of some one. And I am informed that in a baseball game 'extra' you can always find when a umpiar was robbed, or a fan fell off the bleachers, or something, but this heah war-news beats hell!"

I strode blithely out into the hot sunlight, toward the Mexican quarter. Down hot white streets, lined with one-story, white-washed adobes, and past numerous Mexicans, who conversed in the shade of shop-awnings or basked in the sunlight like dark inscrutable Thomas cats, I hastened. At

Digitized by Google

length I came to a large building set back from the street—the insurrecto hospital. Several Mexicans, one with his arm in a sling, were lounging upon the veranda, and of them I inquired for the person in charge.

THE SEÑORITA AND THE WAY TO WAR

ONE arose and entered the building. In a moment, a very young and very pretty Spanish girl, wearing the uniform of a nurse, appeared in the doorway, brows arched inquiringly.

"May I see you in private?" I asked, hat in hand. She smiled—very graciously indeed.

"Yes. Will you come this way?" she said.

"The old scout was wrong about this war business," I thought, as I followed her down a hall into an occupied hospital-room. The pretty nurse closed the door and turned and flashed upon me another charming smile, a glimpse of pearly teeth 'twixt coral lips, as the poet has it. I fumbled for my scarf-pin and tried not to look too pleased. This was so sudden!

"You must forgive me," she said, "for bringing you in here, but all of our rooms are filled. It really makes no difference, except that we must speak softly." She glanced up shyly, demurely. "You are a reporter, are you not?" she asked.

And yet, those are the fellows you hear everywhere, lamenting their short wages and long, hard hours!

"Oh, no," I said, "nothing like that! I am not one of those common cub reporters that run about for local news. Oh, no! I am an independent war correspondent, and I came here to find out the best way of getting to Madero."

"I see," she replied, "I see."

It was evident that she realized my importance. She placed a hesitant finger upon her red underlip.

"But I don't—ah, yes! Señor Garza, secretary of the Junta, is here at this moment. I will bring heem." And with a soft rustle of skirts she was gone.

"That tale of yours," I admonished myself, "was something like the war 'extras,' which, though they may have been on the Plaza, were certainly not on the square. But it was worth it," I mused on complacently. "If you fail to duck over into sunny Mexico quickly enough, you will be brought right back here to this dream of a Dolores, and she will feed you hot tamales and chorchillas, or whatever they call them, and read to you. Maybe you can even hold her hand and call her *chiquita*."

I rearranged my tie with care and twirled my hat in my hands and, noticing the other occupant of the room, glanced carelessly at the still figure lying upon the white, enameled bed near the window. Then, for the first time, I saw a badly wounded man.

He lay as if very tired; limp, inert, one emaciated hand resting feebly upon the coverlet. About his throat was wound a clean white bandage, contrasting strangely with the haggard gray hue of his skin. I glanced up and found his eyes—great, dark eyes—filled with the pain and pathos of endless days and weary, sleepless nights, fixed on me with something of warning in them. Or did I just imagine it?

Then the nurse returned, with Señor Garza. She must have seen the question in my eyes, for she nodded toward the sick man and said sympathetically, "Poor fellow, he is shot three times through his shoulder and throat. One of those horrid machine-guns did it."

"Machine-guns?" I repeated.

"Yes," explained Garza, a fine type of high-caste Mexican, suave and courteous. "The Federals have a great advantage over us, because of their machine-guns. They are very bad. They shoot six hundred times in a minute."

"Oh," I said, vaguely.

The smooth voice of Señor Garza broke in upon my musings.

"But did you wish to see me?" he inquired.

The pretty nurse retired. Outwardly calm, at least, I answered him.

"Yes," I said, "I want to join the insurrectos."

Señor Garza studied the credentials I presented, then he thrust out his hand and smiled.

"I THINK it can be arranged," he said, "but you are a young man, and you must realize what you are going into. It is risky even to join Madero. If the United States cavalry patroling the border, catch you wit' a rifle—— You have a rifle?" he questioned.

"Yes," I replied, "a .30-.30."

"Good," he said, "that or a Mauser—— Well, as I was saying, if the border patrol

Digitized by Google

catch you trying to cross the river, you are pretty sure for two months in a guard-house. Not pleasant, you see," he smiled, with white teeth, "behind the bars instead of in front of them! Ver' dry! Ha, ha!" From a monogrammed cigar-case he extracted cigars, and offered me one, a very small, very black cigarro. "So you must be ver' careful. Then it is possible that the Federals might hear of it through their spies, and wait across the river for you. And last of all—I feel that I should tell you that we are losing many men every day, more than the newspapers hear of. Yes, the risk is considerable, but, on the other hand, it will be a mos' interesting experience, mos' exciting, and you will be fighting for the right."

"I'll go," I said.

"Good, my boy," he said. "Some of our men are going over with ammunition within the next two or three days. Perhaps even to-night. So go just at dusk, wit' your gun wrapped in a blanket, to 61 —— Street, in this quarter. It is a corral and feed-store, and the storekeeper is Pedro. Wait there until some one comes for you. If no one comes to-night, you will have to wait until to-morrow evening." He extended his hand. "And now—until I meet you in Juarez, with Madero's men! I wish you the best of good fortune."

I said *hasta la vista* to the pretty nurse, and left for my hotel, in the hot glare of the midday sun.

I noticed that a Mexican detached himself from the group on the veranda and sauntered carelessly along in my rear.

"Señor Garza," I said to myself, "you are a pretty sly old fox, but there's no need to watch me. Now I'm in it, I am going to see this thing right through to the finish."

And the finish came—but that is my story.

II

THE ARMORY

THE sun had gone down blood-red in the West, and cool darkness had settled over the town, when a light wagon drew up before the corral-shed. The Mexican driver, his cigarette end glowing, climbed down, thrust his head in the door and called softly for "Pedro!"

"*Aquí*," answered the storekeeper, leaving his seat, on a bale of hay near me. Heads together they whispered excitedly, then Pedro the storekeeper turned.

"All is ready," he announced significantly. "Some insurrectos go to-night and you go wit' 'em."

I felt a thrill of excitement as I rose and picked up my rifle.

"This man he take you to the starting place," continued Pedro. "Trust him, but he spik no English. Take care of the Americanos' cavalry, and when you get in Mexico be ready for the *rurales*." He lowered his voice. "Two Federal spies were on the corner this afternoon. Eef we catch 'em to-night—" He laughed and drew his finger across his throat. "But be careful *compadre*, be careful, and when you fight, remember you are fight' for the just cause. Take this bundle of cigarettes wit' you."

I hid my rifle beneath the seat, climbed up beside the driver and we started out of the corral on the road that led—I knew not where. Out through the lighted streets we passed, then turned into a broad avenue that led southward, into the dusk.

The lights of El Paso fell behind as the wagon rattled steadily on down the broad, white road, which seemed gray now, for the night was very dark. A cool breeze had sprung up, with the coming of darkness, and wandered here and there. The tall trees on either side of the road swayed and nodded their heads with soft rustlings.

Now and then a light would appear and come toward us, until we passed some outlying *cantina*, with its bright glare gleaming on the huge straw hats of the Mexicans lounging in the doorways, while, farther away, the tethered horses waited. Or we rattled by some lonely adobe, the peon and his family gathered in the lamplit room. Then would come the low-lying darkness again.

All of a sudden a faint drumming sounded ahead. It grew louder and more distinct, quick plom-plom-plom of horses' hoofs upon the hard road. The Mexican beside me grasped my arm. Then vague figures loomed up in the dusk before us, and swept by with a rattling clatter of hoofs.

"*Americanos soldados*," hissed the driver. The border patrol! Hastily, I reached under the seat and made sure that my rifle was completely covered. Now the darkness seemed blacker than ever, and

Digitized by Google

the rustling trees were whispering dire things.

On we rode, for what seemed an interminable time. At last, the driver spoke.

"*Casa Blanca*," he announced, pointing with his whip to a solitary light that shone far before us.

That must be the mysterious starting-point, there in the darkness. I placed my hand on the cool butt of my revolver.

"Whew," I thought, "I wish the fellows back there at that dead old college could see me now!"

Nearer and nearer came the light, until the silent, white-walled face of the building stood out in bold relief against the night. The Mexican drove past the house, and turned cautiously into a path leading to the rear. Then he climbed down and disappeared. In a few minutes he returned. He found me waiting beside the horse. With a whispered "*Adelante, hombre*," he led the way to where a black rectangle marked a door. Through two dark rooms we went, a bolt was shot, a few words whispered in Spanish, and I stood upon the threshold of what I have since learned was the largest secret armory of the Mexican insurgents.

Three kerosene lamps cast their light on the bronzed faces of a dozen insurrectos, smoking cigarettes and lounging around in a space cleared in the middle of the room. Beyond, dark grotesque shadows fell on cases of rifles and boxes of ammunition and shells piled to the gloom of the ponderous, smoke-blackened beams, whence hung Spanish onions and meats.

In the cleared floor space, a gun-case had been opened, and the lamplight gleamed on the nickeled bolts and smooth, brown stocks of the businesslike Mausers within. Each of the men had at least two belts filled with glinting yellow cartridges, worn over their shoulders or buckled about their waists. Enormous steeple-hats, fashioned from straw or heavy felt, and in a few cases ornamented with gleaming silver thread, were pushed back on their heads or placed on the floor beside them, and their rifles were carried over their knees, or leaned against some convenient box. Cigarette smoke, onions and the cool smell of 'dobe walls—that odor is in my nostrils to this minute.

I went in. The Mexicans arose, smiled and shook hands, and very courteously made a place for me on a box. A bronzed young insurgent, carrying a compact automatic rifle, sat down beside me and began to converse in English.

"When do we start?" I asked him.

"As soon as El Capitan he come from El Paso," answered the youth. "We should start now, before the moon he come up. These expeditions is ver' important. If Madero gets these ammunition he will capture Juarez. If not——"

He shrugged his shoulders significantly. From the look that came into his eyes and the repressed excitement in the fierce, dark faces around me, I knew that it would go hard with any one who would dispute with this expedition on the way to Madero.

EL CAPITAN COMES

I HAD just finished my fourth brown-paper cigarette, and I suppose it was nearly twelve o'clock, when a slow knock sounded above the whispered conversations. An insurgent shot the bolt, and the opened door revealed the Captain standing on the threshold. The lamps lighted up his tall steeple-hat of straw, his heavy, tanned face, with its high cheek-bones and short mustache, and the many-colored blanket that draped his shoulders, as he stood there in bold relief against the outer darkness.

He glanced about the room. Evidently he was satisfied, for he uttered a sharp command. In an instant all was silent confusion. The insurrectos laid aside their cigarettes and guns, and began to carry the boxes out of the room. The young Mexican and myself joined in, and carried three cases of Mausers and a couple of boxes marked "bombs" out through the darkened rooms and into the yard, where a third Mexican helped lift them into the wagons. When the wagons were filled we reëntered the adobe for our rifles.

I slipped five glittering cartridges from one of my belts and shoved them, one by one, into the blued-steel side of my Winchester. That good old gun, whose bark had so often echoed over the lakes and through the scrub pines of Ontario, seemed to me my one best friend and comrade.

Now, the insurrectos, wrapped in blankets, rifles on their shoulders, fell in behind the wagons and, with a slight creaking of wheels, the expedition started on the midnight march to the Rio Grande.

Digitized by Google

We had traveled quite a distance when it seemed to me that the sky was turning light behind us. I looked back and there, over the southeastern horizon, a faint glow was visible. The moon was coming up, and that would increase the chances of our detection.

As though confirming our fears, the Captain grew very uneasy. Shrouded in his *serape*, he rode back and forth upon his small white pony—which was in fine fettle, because of the cool night air, chafing under the bit and shaking his head like some little gray phantom. As the heavens lighted more and more he urged the wagon-drivers to greater efforts, uttering his commands in gutterals and pointing anxiously at the sky.

BUT the great, round rim of the moon, peeping over the horizon, found us still tramping toward the river, and the moonlight had even begun to silver the land when the trail we were following left the fields and began to descend a gradual, sandy slope. Dark lines of reeds and mesquite, sinister, threatening, sprang up head-high on each side of the trail. The night wind, cold and dank now, blew into our faces, and the Mexicans shivered and drew their *serapes* closer about them as we plodded on in silence, save for the wailing of a dry axle on one of the wagons. Now, a strange new smell, the damp, musty smell of a river-bottom, was in the air. What was that, that pale glimmer there? At last, water—the ford of the Rio Grande!

"Halt!" rang sharply from the trail ahead.

The wailing of the axle ceased suddenly. In the dead silence that followed, the deep breathing of the horses sounded strangely loud. Then came a quick order from the Captain. Insurgents crowded around the wagons, muttering threats. Mauser bolts rattled and slammed, as excited, vengeful hands drove home cartridges. It boded ill for whoever blocked the ford—for the lone sentry sticking to his post.

THE TROOPERS

SUDDENLY, out of that mysterious gloom ahead, came a whistle—a shrill signal to hidden comrades. Sharp commands sounded in the darkness on both sides of the trail before us. Steel jingled. Leather creaked. Horses, suddenly set in motion, crashed and rustled through the reeds. Over the reed-tops appeared heads of horsemen, silver-touched by the moonlight.

Some one had betrayed us to the border patrol, and they were closing in on us!

"Hands up there, *pronto!*"

They had reached the first wagon.

"Put 'em up, you ——!"

As though in savage answer, a swift flash split the darkness vindictively—then another, and two loud reports echoed through the moonlit thicket. Instantly the red splash and sharp roar of a trooper's Colt made reply, once, twice, three times——

A wagon-driver, endeavoring to turn short, cursing, lashing, jammed a wheel. The white pony, riderless, dashed ghost-like past me. I lowered the hammer of my Winchester, which I had raised at the first alarm, and pounded up the trail after it. At any moment a fierce conflict might break out, and I find myself arrayed against my own countrymen and, perhaps, unable to protect myself, shot down as a Mexican!

Soon I reached the border of the desert, stopped a minute, listened apprehensively for more firing. But only a confused shouting came from the river, so I pulled my hat on firmly, trailed my gun and started jogging up the trail again—only to stop short. My escape was cut off!

A group of mounted men, riding toward me, topped a rise some three hundred yards distant. One brief moment, they were a solid mass in silhouette against the moonlit splendor of the southeastern sky. Then they broke up and, like black specters, wheeled their horses to right and left, formed a line and came on again, a long, thin array of jogging figures that would sweep through that thicket to the river-bottom like a fine-toothed comb!

Quickly I turned back and, just in time, plunged into the reeds. Southward I ran, parallel to the river, skirting the open desert. Mesquite-bushes reached out sharp, thorny hands to hinder me. Dead reeds stung my face and crackled noisily under foot, as though to warn that approaching line of troopers that here fled their prey.

Dodging, twisting, turning, always in the blackest of shadows, always in danger of treading upon some cold, deadly rattlesnake or venomous desert reptile, or tumbling

Digitized by Google

head foremost into some black pit, I sped, until it seemed that I must be beyond the oncoming line of the patrol. Then I stopped, panting. From behind came the rustle of reeds as the patrol rode down toward the river. Thank heaven! The drag-net had missed me!

But I must hurry, hurry—for the all-revealing moon was rising higher and higher and the open places would soon be as light as day. So out from the cover of the thicket I broke, and started eastward across the rolling desert, back toward the white road and the silent armory that lay somewhere far ahead, under that betraying moon.

Keeping in the shadows of the slopes, I trotted on, bent low to the ground. Twice I caught sight of searching horsemen, like dark creatures of the night touched with phosphorescent light. Luckily, I saw them before they caught sight of me. Then, at last, a light twinkled before me, and I made for it. Perhaps it was the armory. At any rate, where there was a house there must also be a road, and surely a friendly town at the end of the road.

And now the misty gleam of the light, that seemed to offer a haven of refuge, was very near, when I caught sight of a moonlit something moving ahead

I THREW myself flat on the cold ground and lay motionless, watching. Soon I made out two troopers returning to the river. On they came, black and silver in the moonlight. They had almost passed me when one of them reined in his horse and sat looking directly at me. A haunting vision of bars—cold iron bars—rose before me. With it there came a sudden longing for that dear, "dead" old college.

"What's that lump over there in that ditch, Sam?" he called, pointing. The other trooper reined up also and turned in his saddle.

"Why, ——!" he said, "that's a log. None of those Greasers have got this far. Come on," he added, "I want to get back and catch me a Greaser!" He hit his horse a ringing slap on the flank, and cantered on. The first trooper paused a moment, then he too urged his mount ahead.

"You oughta plugged it," called back the impatient one, as they jolted away. "Would 'a' squealed if 'twas a Greaser."

"Har, har!" returned his companion and, wrapped in hilarious merriment, they drew away into the mist.

I got up, rather stiffly, and began to wend my weary way toward that light. Somehow the fear of capture was beginning to leave me, and a growing resentment was taking its place. Those last remarks of the troopers rankled in my bosom.

"Would have squealed if I was plugged, would I?" I muttered. I shook my Winchester defiantly at the place I had last seen them. "Darn you," I threatened, "you better not try to plug me!"

I reached the welcome shadow of the corral fence, plodded past several wondering sleepy horses, past the adobe stable, through a densely shaded orchard, and finally paused in the rear of the house. A white road, the same road I had come down in the wagon, ran in front of the house. I was standing beside the armory itself!

I glanced up the white way, which gleamed in the moonlight. Two or three hundred yards distant a clump of men and horses—another cavalry patrol—cast black shadows upon its lighted surface. The clink-clink of a bridle-chain reached my ears.

"Troopers, troopers everywhere," I thought bitterly, and looked about for a place to hide my gun and equipment.

A ladder leading to the roof in the dense shadow of the wall offered a suggestion. Wearily, I climbed almost to the top and, taking care not to let my head show above the wall, reached over and laid my rifle, belts and revolver upon the flat roof, where they were hidden by a coping that ran all the way around. Then I descended, and gloomily laid the ladder on the ground beside the wall.

So this was the end; the end of my long sought adventure! That I was almost safe now gave me little pleasure. All that mattered was that my chance of reaching Madero—perhaps the only chance I would ever have—was gone; gone forever! I extracted a cigarette from the bundle Pedro the storekeeper had given me. . . . Gone forever and all because of those blooming troopers and that blasted moonlight. . . . I lit the cigarette and glanced upward.

Far, far up in the brilliant heavens the great pale moon looked down on me and upon its face—I could have sworn it—was a jeering, mocking smile.

Digitized by Google

HELD UP BY UNCLE SAM

I STARTED up the road toward the patrol, disgustedly trying to find some plausible reason for being in the neighborhood. Then I remembered that the young insurgent in the armory had spoken of the town of Ysleta as being two or three miles farther down the road. Very well, I had been to Ysleta and, if the patrol didn't believe me, it could go to the deuce!

A dismounted trooper, his open holster-flap showing the smooth butt of his revolver, stopped me first, calling for an officer. At once a well-set-up young lieutenant, very trim and neat in his olive-drab uniform and tan boots, detatched himself from the group of eight or ten men and came toward us. I maneuvered to keep my back to the moon, and tossed away the cigarette.

"Comin' up the road, sir," said the trooper.

"All right," replied the officer, "that 'll do. I'll take him now."

The trooper returned to his post.

"And now my friend," said the young lieutenant, briskly, "what's your name and what are you doing here this time of night?"

"My name," I answered shortly and unpleasantly, "is John Smith."

A grim smile flitted across his moonlit face.

"So your name is John Smith," he agreed very smoothly, "Just *plain* John Smith?"

"No," I said. "John J. Smith."

"Oh, I see. And what might the 'J.' stand for?"

"'Junior'. I am John Smith, Junior."

"Then there must be other John Smiths," he said smiling.

"It looks that way," I admitted.

"Well, may I venture to inquire what keeps you out so late, or rather so early, Mr. Smith?" pursued the officer.

"I was paying a visit," I said, "to my brother in Ysleta."

"What street does he live on, Mr. Smith?" interrupted the officer.

"He lives in the first house outside Ysleta, on this road," I replied, and began to take a certain morose satisfaction in the conversation.

But the lieutenant grew inquisitive.

"Just a moment till I have a look at you," he said and, as he said it, he stepped quickly so that he was in the shadow and the white moonlight was full upon my dirty, scratched face and torn, earth-stained, short overcoat and riding-breeches. He was silent for a space, then he began to snicker.

"I'm sorry, but I can't see the joke," I said stiffly.

He paused in his enjoyment, "No," he admitted, "that would be impossible." Then his voice hardened. "And now, my boy," he said, "judging from your somewhat incriminating appearance, I am afraid that you are going to discover that your name is not Smith but—Dennis! *Hold your hands above your head!*"

He began to search me. First, he explored my overcoat pockets.

"That's not a bomb," I said as sarcastically as I dared, "that's a bundle of cigarettes."

"You don't say!" said the young officer politely.

I resolved to keep my mouth shut in the future.

He finished with my overcoat and concluded his search, which revealed nothing more warlike than a pocket-knife.

"Well, I was wrong," he admitted. "Your name seems to be Smith after all. There's nothing contraband on you. How did you get so scratched up?"

"My pony broke loose," I said, "and I have been chasing him for two hours now, through mesquite and all that, but he got away, so I guess I will have to walk home."

The young lieutenant regarded me silently for a long minute before he spoke.

"All right," he said at last. "Too bad! Rotten habit these ponies have! Now I see no reason why you can not go on." Then he paused. "How the devil did you get into this gun-running business?" he said casually.

I was too mad then to care what happened. It was my last grain of caution that prompted me to demand,

"Is this just between you and me, and not between an officer and a suspect?"

"Sure," he said. "There's not enough evidence against you to hold you."

Untold bitterness was in my voice as I answered him. "You bet I'll tell you," I said, "and then perhaps you'll understand why it is I can't join you in your laughter. For four long months, now, I have been knocking about, looking for adventure. I have gone hungry and cold. I have had to steal rides on freights. I have been chased by constables. I've even gone two whole days without a smoke, because I was seeking

Digitized by Google

an adventure instead of a college degree. And when at last I am right on the trail of a corkin' one, one that would make up for all that I've gone through, along come these—well these troopers, and break up the whole shootin'-match. They shoot some one! They chase me through half the thorny bushes in Texas! They——"

The lieutenant interrupted, with a wave of the hand.

IF ——

"ONE moment, please," he said. "It seems to me that you are quite unnecessarily aroused. It seems that you have a very wrong idea of this affair. I am a kind-hearted man," he went on, "and I would hate to send any one in your state of mind up this road. Besides, it wouldn't be safe. The innocent wayfarer might suffer. Now you ought to look at this thing in a very different light," he said. "Those troopers were but——"

"I knew they were but doing their duty," I broke in angrily. "But what do I care about that? What do I care about the right and wrong of it? That would never bring back my chance of an adventure, or make the eight miles ahead of me any shorter! You couldn't make me feel any different if you talked to me all night!"

"Those troopers," went on the lieutenant, as though I had not spoken, "were but the unconscious instrument of a kind Providence that looks after us all, from the wisest of us down to the youngest fools in existence. The guards at the ford—it may interest you to know that this is the first night the ford has been guarded—reported to me that, just at dusk, from eighty to a hundred Federals from Juarez showed up in the hills just across the river. The guard said that the Federals had hidden a machine-gun so as to sweep the trail on the other side of the ford, and they wanted to know what to do about it, as they were almost in the line of fire. So now your friends the enemy are over there in the moonlight, waiting for you to come and get shot up." He paused impressively. "And now, doesn't that alter the situation a little, my would-be insurgent? Isn't this a pretty nice old night to be alive on?"

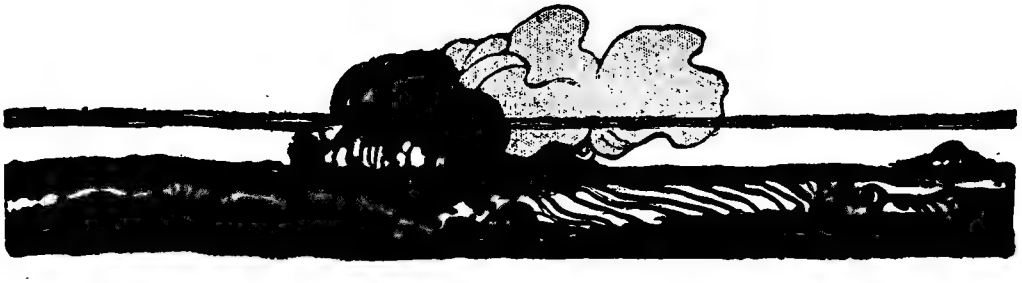
I couldn't think of anything to say. There was quite a long silence. I rubbed my nose reflectively. Machine-gun! Ugh! I tilted back my Stetson and gazed about with a new interest in the lovely night.

The moonlight was flooding the fairy landscape, deluging in its white glow the squat, silent adobe on the smooth road, the feathery tree-tops of the orchard, the sloping plains that faded away in the mist.

I looked up at the man in the moon. He was still smiling down. Then I laughed aloud, in the pure happiness of living.

"Why, bless my boots, Lieutenant," I said, "I guess you're right, after all!"

And I said good-by, lit a cigarette and started cheerfully up the broad white way that led to El Paso.



Digitized by Google

61° N., 61° W.

By Stephen Allen Reynolds

WHEN I missed sailing with the *Bertha* on account of being laid up in hospital with a bad arm, I felt rather cut up about it. The *Bertha* was a good whale-ship—honest owners, a good skipper, and all that—and good whale-ships were already getting scarce. I might have been mate, with a fifty-dollar monthly guarantee and a twenty-fifth "lay." I had no use for coasting. Deep-water freighters were out of my line, and I had no stomach for a six-month "plum-pudding" voyage in some one-hundred-ton schooner commanded by a greasy, barefooted Portuguese.

So when the doctors told me that I could leave, I lost no time in getting out of the iodoform-scented building and down to the water-front, to see what was doing in my line.

It wasn't long before I learned that the *Aurora* was the only square-rigged, oil-chasing hooker left in port, and that "Beef" Hawkins was fitting her out for an eighteen-month voyage north, for bowheads and maybe some Hudson Bay Eskimo trade. She needed a second mate, so one of the riggers working on her told me, and was expected to clear within a week. Much as I hated to sail with "Beef" Hawkins, it seemed to be my only chance to get away that season and, to tell the truth, I wasn't half sorry for a chance to see the big bergs and floes again. There's a certain fascination about the Far North, as any one who's been there knows.

Beef Hawkins had a reputation that smelled like a bony-fishing steamer in July. He owed his nickname to a habit he had of calling for "More beef!" when he needed extra men on the topsail-halyards, or some other heavy job. He was both owner and master of the *Aurora*, and had sailed her pretty well all over the Seven Seas, sealing, whaling, "blackbirding" and what not.

He was a grizzle-headed ruffian, some fifty years old, and stood six feet four in his sea-brogans. He had reddish-brown eyes, a mouthful of big yellow teeth and a pair of hairy paws that hung almost down to his knees—when he wasn't using them on some one. Curiously enough, he had a very mild voice. No one who had sailed with him ever heard him raise it in anger.

It was whispered of him, around New Bedford, that upon one occasion he had poisoned twelve Argentine soldiers. It seems he was poaching seals off the Argentine coast when a cruiser nailed him, within the three-mile limit, with fresh pelts

Digitized by Google

on the beams. The *Commandante* seized the *Aurora* in the name of the Republic, and then put a prize crew aboard with orders to sail her into Bahia Blanca. They say that when night fell and the cruiser was out of sight, Beef poisoned a demijohn of rum and invited all the marines to pitch in. Some say that the drug was morphine, and that he and his steward poked the sleepers overboard through a big port in the skipper's cabin. The steward never lived to see New Bedford again—Beef probably gave him a push one dark night—and the man at the wheel, who saw the lieutenant and his eleven soldiers go below and never come back, was so scared that he jumped the *Aurora* at St. Helena.

Then there was another story about Beef shooting down a West African boat-steerer. The *Aurora* had just left Hudson Strait, and was somewhere off Cape Chidley, when Beef came on deck and ordered the courses set. The black fellow—"Calico" they called him, on account of some white spots on his face—was ordered aloft to loose the mains'l. He hadn't cast off the first gasket before Beef called him out of his name, and told him to "shake a leg" or he'd have him tied up and whipped "like all niggers ought to be."

Calico rolled his eyes and gritted his teeth as the whining curses of the skipper floated up to him, but he didn't answer. He knew better. He let go the bunt, and came down in time to tail on to the sheet before it was made fast.

About five minutes later, after the fores'l had been set, Calico was standing in the waist of the *Aurora* with his pipe in his mouth. Beef was about twelve feet away from him, leaning against the break of the poop. Calico had just gotten out his sheath-knife, and was going to cut up some tobacco—as every one of the watch on deck thought—when Beef suddenly drew his Colt and plugged the black fellow through the head. They buried him the same day. Beef entered the affair in the log, claiming that he had been forced to shoot Calico in self-defense. Nothing was ever done about the matter.

THERE was other evil talk about Beef Hawkins floating around town. They say that he once clipped an ear off an inoffensive Nova Scotian greenhorn who'd been suspected of stealing a pie from the galley; that he always came into port short-handed, on account of "losing" men at sea so that he could pocket their share; that—— But I think I've said quite enough to explain why I'd have preferred some other whaling-hooker than the *Aurora*.

"But," thought I, as I talked with the soft-voiced Hawkins, "all these yarns may be more or less hearsay. He's probably not as black as he's painted."

Beef had heard of me, as it turned out, and he was more than anxious to have me for a second mate, for I was a first-class whaleman and pretty fair navigator, if I do say so myself.

"Mr. Robinson," said he later, after I'd spread my John Hancock over the articles of agreement, "I'm glad to have a good man like you. If it wasn't that Ben Tompkins is already signed as mate, you would be first, and him second. We oughter make a rousin' good voyage with you along, for nobody's worked the Bay for two years back. The fish must be pretty thick by now, I reckon."

Four days later, the riggers were through with the *Aurora*, and the old bark was towed out into midstream and anchored, so the greenhorns we'd caged already couldn't run away unless they were water-walkers. A day or so later, after the last batch of the for'ard crowd had been dumped aboard, we manned the windlass. Some old shellback struck up "Sally Ann, I Love Your Daughter," and in less than an hour we had the mud-hook catted and fished, and were slipping toward the open waters of Buzzards Bay.

II

BEN TOMPKINS, the mate, headed the port watch of course, while I took charge of the starboard. Ben was a lanky, easy-going sort of a whaleman with a great liking for his rum. In fact, that weakness was chiefly responsible for his presence on the *Aurora*. He might have had his own ship long before, but he was very apt to be found stretched out in his berth at critical times, useless and helpless, with an empty bottle not far away. Owners had weighed Ben and had found him wanting, so nothing remained for him but a berth on the undesirable *Aurora*.

Digitized by Google

The third mate was a slow-spoken Scotchman, John Ferguson by name. He'd been mate of a Dundee whaler until it was blown ashore on the Labrador the Fall before and, rather than go home with empty pockets, on a consular requisition, he'd decided to have another try at the North. He seemed a rather decent sort, and I had an idea that we'd get along well.

The crew, outside of the cooper and the boat-steerers, were of the usual sort: city scum, wharf-rats, a seasoned deep-water man or two who'd been inveigled aboard by the runners and a sprinkling of adventurous lads who wanted to see what an iceberg looked like. The cook, Manuel Silva, a quarter-breed from the Portuguese Islands, is worth mentioning on account of what happened later. He'd been with Beef for several voyages, and it was said he'd saved a tidy sum of money out of his lay, to say nothing of what he'd made on slush. Slush, I might explain, is the fat which the cook skims off the water which salt beef has been boiled in.

The only other characters on board the *Aurora* who have much to do with this story, were "Gaffer" Brown, the steward, and "Kabendi," a black boat-steerer. The steward was of Cockney origin. He was an undersized, shifty-eyed weakling that I couldn't cotton to, somehow or other. His very looks and sneaky actions seemed to breed mistrust.

Kabendi—I never knew his other name—claimed to hail from Portuguese West Africa, just below where the Line slashes into the French Congo. I'll say three things for him: he was the blackest, the strongest and the most reckless human being I've ever seen. He was so black that an ebony fid we had on board looked pale beside him. Strong, did I say? He was like a dozen powerful men rolled into one. Later in the voyage, when a cooling-tank full of hot oil broke from its lashings and took charge of the deck, the black fellow watched it like a cat until it fetched up against the try-works. Then, before the old hooker had a chance to roll the other way, Kabendi jumped between the starboard rail and the tank. He braced his back against the rail, planted both feet upon the tank and roared for some one to lash it. Before any of the crew could gather their wits, the *Aurora* rolled to starboard. A ton and a half of hot oil failed to crumple the black fellow up. Before the bark could roll upon him twice, I bored a hole in the crowd and got a turn round that tank. It was lucky for him that the tank was only about three parts full, for if a gallon of that hot oil had slopped over on him, it would 've burnt him to the bone.

And speaking of recklessness—I've seen him go over the side fully dressed, dive under the *Aurora* and haul himself up the other side upon the end of a buntline, three times hand-running! And all on account of a bet of a pound of tobacco! Of course this was before we got into the ice. But I'm getting ahead of my story.

Naturally, there was a lot of brutality on board. When the skipper was on deck, he couldn't seem to give an order without following it up with either a kick or a clout. Now in bad waters, when you've got to get the men aloft lively to save your spars or your canvas, there's some excuse for toeing a skulker. I've often done it myself. It's the way of the sea. But there was no excuse for the bucko work of Beef Hawkins. It made my blood boil. We weren't out a week before I felt called upon to interfere.

WE WERE off Cape Sable, ploughing along nor'eastward, when the wind freshened up so that we had to reduce sail. It was my watch on deck, but Beef was perched on the foc'sle-head. I sung out to take in the royals and the flying-jib. A greenhorn named Swift jumped for the flying-jib down-haul and started pulling away. The sail jammed half-way down the stay and, before another man could reach the poor chap to help him out, the skipper leaned over and fetched him a mighty kick under the jaw.

"I think that's entirely uncalled for, Cap'n Hawkins," said I, as I approached, all my muscles taut.

Beef jumped down from his perch and slipped one of his big fists into his side-pocket.

"Mr. Robinson," said he, quiet-like, "I'd thank you to remember who's in command. When I want your advice, I'll ask you for it."

His little reddish-brown eyes fairly spit out venom as he spoke, and that hairy paw in his pocket promised sudden death were I to raise my hand against him. I knew he never went unarmed, and had sense

Digitized by Google

enough to realize that a man with a hammerless automatic could plug me from his pocket.

He grinned at me as I hesitated. I took one look at the ominous bunch in the pocket of his reefer, and then turned away. I had no intention of dying at the hands of a dog like that—with no chance for an even break. After that I never spoke to him except in the line of duty.

We were bearing up to slip through the Strait of Belle Isle when he and the mate came together. It seems that Ben had some rum planted where the skipper couldn't find it, and was nipping away at it just enough to keep under the influence. We were in bad waters. Beef needed clear-headed men on deck. So he warned the mate to cut it out.

Tompkins quit drinking for two watches, then made up for lost time. He came on deck, one evening, hardly able to walk. The weather was fairly clear, so I made no bones about turning over the deck to him, and then went below.

An hour or so after I'd turned in, I was awakened by a smashing sound. My berth was in the main cabin, only the mate and the skipper having rooms to themselves. I was on the point of jumping out of my berth when I heard Beef's voice telling me to stay where I was. Then I saw what caused the noise. Across the way, through the open door of the mate's room, I saw the skipper bending over the smashed lid of Ben Tompkins's big sea-chest. He was handing over bottles to Gaffer Brown, the steward. I chuckled to myself and went off to sleep, glad that an end was being put to the mate's nonsense.

I relieved Ben at midnight, and waited for the fun. I hadn't long to wait, for a roar went up almost as soon as the mate disappeared. The skipper came out and took a hand. I heard a sound of oaths and blows, but before I could get below, all was quiet.

"I'd thank you to stay on deck till you're relieved, Mr. Robinson," were the captain's words to me, as I sized up the senseless form of the lanky mate, which lay sprawled in one corner of the cabin.

I turned on my heel and headed for the companionway, because I saw that the speaker had a pistol in his hand, and felt instinctively that he'd shoot me upon slight provocation. Evidently he'd not seen fit to shoot his chief officer. But when Ben relieved me, he told me that Beef had used the butt of the pistol upon him. Several of his teeth were gone, and he was still spitting blood as I went off watch.

Truly, thought I, as I rolled into my berth, the voyage promised to be a bloody one. But I never dreamed of what I was destined to witness before seeing port again.

III

THE first of August found us between Resolution Island and Cape Chidley, bucking our way through the ice. For three hundred miles we clawed our way through the floes and past the bergs, before we sighted the clear waters of the upper strait. And Beef Hawkins was certainly a crackerjack ice-pilot, in spite of his other shortcomings; for day and night, as long as there was a bit of favorable air and a "lead" wide enough to slip the *Aurora* through, he'd be found in the crow's-nest, conning the old bark along.

He seemed to know every treacherous current between Chidley and the Upper Savages, every uncharted rock and shoal in Hudson Strait. He knew when to tie up to the ice, and just what direction it was going to take. When you've seen a million-ton berg crashing its way southeast through a hundred-acre field of ten-foot "floe-ice" drifting temporarily in an opposite direction, you'll begin to appreciate what I mean. Of course it's simply a question of knowing the surface and bottom currents, and then estimating how much water a certain piece of ice draws—but I can't go into that now.

In due time, we left the ice behind us and headed for Whale Point, to see what the natives had in the way of trade. On the way across the Bay, we managed to kill and cut in a fifty-barrel cow. Kabendi—whom I'd picked out for my boat-steerer—was the one to get fast. The cow was all alone, and traveling lively—making a passage to join her friends, I suppose. I thought we were surely going to lose her, for she sounded fully sixty feet away from us, and was going much faster than we possibly could.

"Good-by, my lady," said I to myself, when I saw the whale begin to settle. But I didn't reckon with Kabendi. He sized up the little patch of black that was slowly

Digitized by Google

disappearing, and picked up his iron. Before I could tell him not to make a fool of himself, he drew back his mighty right arm and darted. Never, before or since, have I seen a dart like that, for the patent iron flew through the air and hit the vanishing lady just behind her right fin. 'Twas all over in an hour.

We'd just about got cleaned up after the cutting-in and trying-out, when we raised Whale Point. Dozens of *kaiaks* and old whale-boats loaded with kindly natives came off to meet us, and our deck was soon swarming with Eskimos, old and young. I'd never as yet wintered in the Bay, but the knowledge I'd gained during two winters in Cumberland Sound proved valuable to me, for I found that the dialects did not differ greatly.

As we approached the shore, Beef ordered the main-yard hauled aback, and a boat lowered to take him ashore to see about the trade. My boat's crew was as smart as any, so I suppose that was the reason he asked me to set him ashore. The *Aurora* braced her main-yard as soon as we were clear, and stood on and off while we pulled toward the village of skin *tupeks*, convoyed by the head-man's whale-boat.

The trade was rather disappointing. There was a half a ton or so of short whalebone, which I figured wouldn't fetch more than a dollar a pound; two polar-bear skins—summer pelts; a few dozen white-fox skins, that didn't amount to much; one lone musk-ox hide and about fifty pounds of walrus ivory. My agreement called for a share of all trade taken in during the voyage, and I'd hoped for better luck.

Beef seated himself on a pile of furs just outside of the head-man's *tupek*, and began to bargain for the stuff. While this was going on, I strolled through the village, casual-like, never dreaming of what I was going to stumble over. The skin tents were practically deserted. Those of the natives who hadn't stayed aboard the *Aurora* were grouped around the skipper, except for a few youngsters down where our boat was beached.

I'd reached the last tent, and was looking inland at the barren, rocky, God-forsaken country, with its little green patches of moss and grass here and there, when a familar odor came to my nostrils. It was a musky, sickish-sweet kind of a smell. For barely an instant, I fancied musk-oxen were around. Then it came over me like a flash that it was not the season, and too near human habitations for those wary creatures.

As I stood there, wondering vaguely where the odor came from, a couple of snarling huskies slunk away from a pile of refuse near-by. Idly I surveyed the mound. I saw some rotting deer-skins, hairless and useless; some enormous bones, part of the skeleton of a whale, half-buried under a heap of lumps of some wax-like grayish substance. My curiosity was aroused. I drew closer and picked up a lump of the stuff. Then I began to tremble, in spite of myself. I broke off a small piece of the substance and lit it. It burned freely, giving off a characteristic odor.

ACTING more like a maniac than a sane whaleman, I snatched at the rotting hides, and then heaved the bones to one side. The result of my efforts was a pile of the waxy lumps some four feet high. I could scarcely believe my own eyes. Turning away, I half ran and half walked to where the Captain was seated, and whispered to him to accompany me. Something in my actions must have puzzled him, for he gave me a quick, searching look.

"Come!" I urged him. "There's a small fortune lying back here on the rocks."

Followed by a group of wondering natives, I led Beef Hawkins to my find. He picked up a lump of the stuff, and smelt of it.

"*Ambergris*, by all that's holy! *Ambergris!*" he finally managed to say, his voice all but betraying his excitement.

"Almost two hundred pounds of it!" I chipped in.

"And prime stuff, too," went on the *Aurora's* master, as he took out his pocket-knife and dug into the grayish mass.

"And it'll fetch every penny of eighteen dollars an ounce," he added, a moment later.

Sure enough, it was ambergris, and a goodly quantity of it. Never had I seen more than thirty pounds of it in a batch. Never had I heard of any other species of whale secreting the precious material but the sperm-whale of warmer latitudes. Who ever heard of a sperm-whale entering Hudson Bay? Yet here was two hundredweight of it at our feet; a pile worth from fifty thousand dollars to twice as much.

Digitized by Google

"Where'd this stuff come from, Netooluk?" asked Beef of the English-speaking head-man.

"Big dead whale drift 'shore before ice come one year 'go," explained Netooluk, amazed that two *Kabloonah* officers should manifest such an interest in the refuse-heap of the village of his people. "We catch blubber, make oil," he went on. "Cut him up meat for dogs. This whale got different kind teeth—me never see before. Whale dead plenty long time. That pieces stuff no good—no make oil. Dog eat—make dog sick—no good."

Netooluk waved the long stem of his pipe at the valuable pile as he finished speaking, and scowled mildly at us as if chiding us for our ignorance.

You may ask me how the carcass of a sperm-whale came to drift ashore in northwestern Hudson's Bay. I can't explain it, unless it died in waters unfrequented by sharks, was caught by some vagrant current, and was then borne into the Arctic and down Fox Channel. It seems hardly possible for it to have drifted up Hudson Strait against the southeasterly current. In the cold waters of those regions, flesh only rots to a certain extent. For my part, I believe in the Fox Channel theory. But if you're looking for facts, you may as well ask me why persons buried at sea always sink with their faces toward the west, or why a dead whale usually drfits to windward.

"And how much of this stuff did the dogs eat?" asked Beef.

"Not too much," answered Netooluk. "Him make dog plenty sick—no good."

"Well, I think we'll take it aboard and burn it," decided the skipper, as he winked at me. "This stuff's liable to breed sickness in camp, but it's very good luck for a vessel that can get hold of some of it to burn."

The credulous natives would have believed Beef Hawkins had he told them that the walrus would all leave the Bay upon a certain date. Such is the influence of the *Kabloonah* in the Far North.

"Mr. Robinson, I don't see any necessity of takin' all hands and the cook into this ambergris proposition," said Beef, in his quiet way. "You and I are the only ones who know anything about it. We'll get it aboard on the Q.T., and divvy up whatever it fetches when we get home. What d' yer say? It'll be share and share alike 'tween us two?"

"That would be a crooked deal, Captain," I made bold to answer. I pointed toward the beach where my boat's crew were chinning with some of the native women. "Those men have worked hard and faithful. They're on a lay—not on wages—and the agreements call for a share of all native trade, bone, oil, ambergris and salvage. I couldn't be a party to cheating 'em out of their whack."

Beef's eyes grew narrower as he listened. His fingers twitched convulsively for a few moments, then he slipped his hands into his pockets. For an instant, I thought he was going to shoot me down in cold blood, and right then and there I regretted that I hadn't pretended to side in with him, only to tip off the officers and crew after we got home.

Whatever was running through Beef Hawkins's mind during those few seconds, I can't say; but he wound up by shrugging his big shoulders.

"Maybe you're right," he said, with an unpleasant leer. "Pull right off to the ship now, and fetch back an empty cask for this mess. Bring the cooper ashore, and tell him to bring the beam-scales and his cooperin' tools."

On the way back to the *Aurora*, I reflected that I'd taken the wisest course after all; for, had Beef imagined that the secret of the ambergris find lay solely between the two of us, he'd surely have found some way of getting rid of me before the voyage was over.

Picked over, washed and weighed carefully, we found that we had a few ounces over one hundred and eighty-six pounds of the choicest ambergris any of us had ever seen. Worth at least eighteen dollars an ounce, it represented the value of a dozen fat bowheads. It meant more than a thousand dollars to me, and that's quite a sum for a man who goes whaling on a lay. Between fifty and sixty thousand dollars is a pretty fair day's work, according to my way of thinking.

WE GOT two more whales before the ice began to "make," which made all hands feel pretty good, in spite of the daily brutalities whenever the skipper was on deck. The voyage was already a success—from the pay-day standpoint.

Digitized by Google

Long before the snow gathered on the mainland, we warped the *Aurora* into her Winter quarters, behind a reef off Cape Fullerton. Shorter and shorter grew the days, and brighter grew the rays of the *Aurora's* namesake. As the ice "made" around us, we built a temporary deck-house aft, covering the whole poop. Weather-proofed with building-paper and battens, it made a fairly decent shelter, after we got a big stove set up in it.

On most ships in Winter quarters, the crew has nothing to do but to pump ship once a day and keep the fires going. 'Twasn't so on the *Aurora* though. If there ever was a slave-driving brute in command of a whaler, Beef Hawkins was one. I've no doubt but that he often lay awake nights trying to think up some unnecessary work for the men to do.

First, he had every link of both cables polished and oiled. Then he had all the whaling-gear overhauled. It's all right to keep the rust off tools and keep them oiled, but when it comes to burnishing bomb-guns and hand-irons, it's going too far. Beside, the bright gear is apt to alarm the fish you're laying to.

When the snow came, Beef had the ship banked up. Then he had the blubber-room scraped and holystoned, and the ground tier of oil-casks broken out of the lower hold and restowed—foolish, get-nowhere jobs.

Week in, week out, this sort of work continued, until every man Jack aboard prayed that lightning would strike the skipper, or that a polar bear would make a meal out of him. It wasn't the work alone; 'twas the kicks and clouts that every one got when he was around. If the devil ever had any apostles, Beef must surely have been one of them. There was something positively uncanny about the quiet way in which he'd reel off a string of horrible oaths—all delivered without once raising his voice, but punctuated with his fist and boot.

Did I say that he struck and kicked every one? That's not quite correct. There were three exceptions: Kabendi the big negro, the cook and myself. Beef had heard about the black fellow and the oil-tank, and he'd seen him tie up the maintopgallants'l single-handed, upon more than one occasion. The wily skipper must have felt it in his bones that, if he laid a hand on the big fellow, he'd have his back broken or his head caved in before he could pull his gun.

Why he kept his hands off me, I can't say—unless 'twas because I always kept my own counsel, and carried out his orders as best I could. Then again, my strength and temper may have been a factor, for, outside of Kabendi and the skipper himself, I guess I was easily the strongest and quickest man aboard the hooker. I'll come to the cook later.

When the snow got deep enough, the Eskimos changed from *tupek* to *igloo*, and venison began to come aboard. But never an ounce of deer-meat found its way into the foc'sle. A limited supply of weevily biscuit, salt-horse that had been pickled about the time Lee surrendered, and "hot-wet-and-dirty," sweetened with a few drops of molasses, was the daily menu for the crew.

Of course they growled and swore—behind our backs—and I knew that trouble and sickness would follow. Then came the bitter arctic cold, which no man without furs could face and live. Touched by scurvy, two of the men took to their bunks. I reported the cases to Beef.

"I'll soon get 'em up and around, —— their eyes," whined the master of the *Aurora*, as he fumbled around in his medicine-chest and got out a bottle of capsules.

Now I knew that you can't buck the scurvy with pills and medicine. It's simply a question of vegetables, pickled beets, vinegar, lime-juice or something of that sort; but I held my tongue—much as I regret it now, no matter what my indiscretion might have cost me.

It was about six o'clock in the evening when Beef administered the first dose of medicine to the sufferers, and it turned out to be the last, for at breakfast-time the next morning, one of the crew came aft to report that both of the sick men were dead. I was astonished at the news, for I'd been given to understand that both of the men were suffering from the scurvy, and scurvy is a lingering disease, lasting sometimes for a period of months before death comes.

One of the dead men was a greenhorn from Connecticut; the other, a Portuguese Islander, on his second, and last, cruise.

I didn't think much about it at the time, but it struck me afterward that the faces of the dead men were strangely swollen

Digitized by Google

and discolored. I broke out a new bolt of No. 2 canvas, and we fashioned shrouds for the poor lads. Then came the sled-trip to the edge of the floe, where the waters of the bay never freeze over, and there Beef Hawkins and such of us as had furs, stood around with bowed heads and watched the bubbling white parcels disappear beneath the surface of the smoky waters.

EARLY the next morning, while inspecting the foc'sle, I discovered that six men were missing. It didn't take me long to trace them to the *igloo* village, and there I found an old native bemoaning the loss of his half-witted son, together with eleven strong dogs. I hastened back to the ship—a walk of fifteen minutes—and reported the runaways.

"They'll never reach Marble Island—let alone Churchill," calmly commented the Captain. "Besides," he continued, "now I won't have to feed 'em all Winter, and they'll lose their share."

"But you'll need 'em for the Spring whaling, after we get out of the ice," I remonstrated.

"Mr. Robinson," coolly went on the brute, "I don't care if they all run away, as long as we have six or eight good men to work this bark back to port. I've got a rich cargo on board, and I don't care if we don't raise a single whale this Spring. If a few more of 'em run away, it'll suit me to a T. They lose their share—and that means more money for me."

"But these men will freeze," I persisted, as I thought of the five-hundred-mile stretch of dangerous shore-ice which lay between them and the nearest Hudson Bay Company's outpost at Fort Churchill.

"Let 'em freeze, —— 'em," was the cold-blooded reply. "They made their bed—now they can sleep on it."

"With your permission, I'll get Netooluk's dogs and fetch the runaways back," I proposed.

"You'll get no such permission from me, and if you leave this bark for any such purpose, I'll log you as a deserter and mutineer."

That seemed to settle the matter for the time being. Later in the forenoon, however, I sought out Netooluk and persuaded him to send a kinsman after the party.

Four days later, the native returned from a fruitless quest. He had traced the runaways to a point where the drifting ice butted up against the landlocked ice, and assumed that they'd been blown offshore, while negotiating a short cut between two headlands. Neither the men nor the dogs were ever heard from again, to my knowledge.

Slowly the long Winter nights passed away, until the days began to lengthen perceptibly. February was enlivened by two attempts upon the Captain's life—both unsuccessful, I'm sorry to say when I stop to think of Ben Tompkins. The first attempt was made one evening as Beef started shoreward for a visit to the *igloos*. He'd barely gained the ice when a steel marlinspike came hurtling from out the dark shadows of the deck above him, just grazing his shoulder. Yet every man for'ard was in his bunk a minute later, and all seemed to be sound asleep.

A few days afterward, a piece of ice weighing at least a hundredweight, crashed down from aloft. It missed Beef's head by less than a foot. We found out later that a hole had been pierced through the ice-cake; that it had been made fast aloft at a point just above the entrance to the deck-house and that the trick had been worked by means of a slip-knot and a cord running into the foc'sle. We never found out who pulled the cord, though, and I can't say that I tried very hard to learn.

These attempts upon Beef's life accomplished results, though, for it scared him into serving the crew a mess of pickled beets every day. And he also cut out some of the unnecessary work and kicks.

April came around, and found Ben Tompkins ailing. He didn't seem to have any appetite, and it strikes me that he must have had a touch of ship's-fever. He begged hard for a few drops of rum, but Beef wouldn't give him any. Ben got worse and worse, until finally he couldn't leave his room.

One night along toward the beginning of May, I turned in much earlier than usual. I couldn't seem to get to sleep, though, and lay wide awake for some time. My berth, as I said before, was in the main cabin. Across from me was the mate's room, and, aft of all, the larger room of the skipper. The cabin was perfectly dark, and I was alone in it, for I'd just left Ferguson in the

Digitized by Google

deck-house above, and the cook and steward had long since gone to their bunks in the steerage.

Suddenly the door of the skipper's room swung open, and I saw him looking toward the closed door of Tompkins's room. Beef had two bottles in his hands: a large one, and a much smaller one. The swinging lamp shone directly in his face, giving me a good view of it. There was an expression upon it that startled me in spite of myself—an expression of craftiness, coupled with something else that I can't describe.

He crossed the cabin to the mate's room, and entered. Ben's lamp was turned low, and I could see little or nothing of the interior of the stateroom. But before the door swung to behind the Captain, I heard these words:

"Here's the whisky I promised you. But I want you to take one of these capsules first. It'll kill that fever that's——"

The closed door shut out the rest of the Captain's words. Even then, I never suspected the horrible truth, although I was puzzled to account for this curious catering to Ben's well-known weakness.

As it was, it was Ben Tompkins's last drink on earth, for the Cockney steward reported him "dead as a nyle," early the next day. The lips were blue, the face swollen, the bleary eyes wide open.

Suddenly it all flashed over me:

Beef Hawkins was thinning out the ship's company!

BUT suspicions were not proof. I had to be positive before planning to put an end to his activities. Before we returned from the edge of the floe the second time, I'd resolved upon a plan. I watched my chance the next afternoon and, while Beef was taking his daily walk to the native village, I slipped into the skipper's room and took a look at his medicine-chest. I had no trouble in locating the bottle of capsules. It was half full, and labeled "Fever Capsules."

I appropriated three of the capsules, and made my way to the deck-house. Wrapping a piece of raw salt meat around one of the capsules, I then tied it lightly with thread. At the gangway of the *Aurora*, I found the usual pack of half starved huskies from the native village, waiting for scraps from the galley. I singled out a big yellow dog that had once tried to bite me, and tossed him the prepared meat. He swallowed it at a gulp.

Then came the period of observation. I knew that it would take some time before the gelatin was digested and the contents of the capsule brought into action, so I went below and took a nap for an hour. When I came on deck again, I saw at a glance that the yellow dog was in trouble.

The rest of the pack circled around the distressed animal, ready to devour him as soon as he fell. I drove them away with a club, just as the big husky toppled over dead. I had confirmed my worst suspicions. What the poison was I never learned—arsenic or strychnin I suppose.

"Whose turn would it be next?" I asked myself as I tried to form a plan.

It was quite evident that this monster had planned to do away with most of the officers and crew, sparing barely enough men to help him work the *Aurora* back to New Bedford.

IV

THAT evening I called John Ferguson out on the ice, where no one could overhear us.

"My ——, mon, I can scarce believe it!" said he, after I had told him the horrible tale.

Knowing that the poisoner would try to make away with more of us before we broke out of Winter quarters, we decided upon immediate action. Kabendi, the powerful black, was to be taken into our confidence, and we three were to leap upon the Captain and overpower him when he appeared in the deck-house the next morning. We were to take him prisoner—dead or alive. Then—if alive—we proposed to lock him up in the blubber-room, and take him back to the States for trial. Meanwhile, in the name of the law, I was to take command of the vessel.

"Mr. Robinson" said Beef to me, as I was turning in, that night, "the steward tells me that you were in my room to-day, while I was ashore. Did you want anything in particular with the medicine-chest?"

"No, sir. Only a little flaxseed for a poultice," I lied, looking him straight between the eyes.

"Better ask me for it another time. I

Digitized by Google

don't want anybody pryin' around in my room."

With these words he entered his room and slammed the door.

WHETHER he suspected me of knowing something about his fiendish work or not, I can't say. Possibly he knew just how many capsules he had on hand, and missed three. At any rate, he tried to murder me before I went to sleep.

He came out of his room bearing an oil-can, a shotgun and a handful of rags. He turned the lamp up, placed the oil-can on the back of the stove and took a seat about ten feet away from where I was lying. Through the curtain around my berth I could see him plainly. At this juncture, the third mate came below with an old magazine he'd borrowed from one of the crew. He glanced curiously at the gun-cleaner, and then seated himself for a look at the magazine. I didn't dare go to sleep with that fiend cleaning his gun so close to me. The brown muzzle was pointed in my direction. I watched him clean both barrels and replace the shells. From where I was lying in the darkness, he could not possibly see that I was watching him.

Suddenly, I caught a stealthy glance in my direction. The loaded weapon was across his knees, pointed straight for the head of my berth. I saw the fingers slip toward the trigger-guard—but I couldn't stand it any longer. I ducked my head and rolled toward the foot of my berth, just as the gun roared and two loads of buckshot tore through the curtain behind me.

It was no time for words. I sprang out of bed and flung myself upon the murderer, Ferguson following suit. We all went to the deck together. I was on top, struggling to plant my knee across Beef's throat, when one of his long arms shot up, and a thumb of steel cut off my wind and my senses.

When I was able to look around, I saw Kabendi sitting upon Beef Hawkins's chest. The brute was already handcuffed, and Ferguson was fitting a pair of old-fashioned ankle-irons to him. Quite a few of the crew stood around, seemingly well pleased with the way matters were shaping up.

When I felt able to speak, I called all hands aft, and told them that I was taking command of the *Aurora*, and that her former master would be held a prisoner until we could turn him over to the proper authorities. Then I ordered a small stove set up in the blubber-room, 'tween-decks. I didn't want the prisoner to freeze; and I promised myself that I'd fetch him home to the hangman if it were a possible thing.

Not a word did Beef Hawkins utter after the big black had torn him loose from my throat. He shuffled along to his prison, working his fingers and grating his teeth. I took away his pistol, his matches, and informed him that he could have the run of the blubber-room, but that if he cut up any capers I'd have the cooper iron him to the deck for the balance of the voyage.

I also warned him that if, by any chance, he should manage to force his way through the partition into the steerage, or out on deck, I'd shoot him on sight.

WITHIN a few days, I had everything running smoothly on the hell-ship. I won the confidence of the men by feeding them better, and treating them like human beings. I picked out a likely-looking Englishman to act as second mate, but resolved to stand watch and watch—Ferguson and I—during the voyage home.

The prisoner gave me no trouble. The steward carried his meals to him three times a day, and I didn't expect that Beef would give me any more cause for concern.

June slipped by, with every indication of an early break-up, and the tenth of July found us warping the *Aurora* through a lead into the open waters of the Bay. I'd made up my mind not to devote any time to whaling, but to make a passage to New Bedford as quick as the old hooker could foot it.

The day after we got clear of the shore ice, we bade "*tab-bow-hoodee*" to our Eskimo friends, and squared away for Cape Wolstenholme. We had a fair wind and current for ten days, and didn't see much heavy ice on our way down the Strait. It kept me pretty busy, standing watch and watch, dodging the ice, writing up the log and looking after things in general. I still clung to my berth in the cabin, and never entered Beef Hawkins's room save when I wanted to consult a chart, or enter something in the log.

Digitized by Google

V

FINALLY came the day that I'll never forget as long as I live. We'd cleared the Strait about midnight, but I was still heading almost due east, to give Chidley a wide berth before hauling down toward the Labrador. Aft, over the port quarter, I could just make out the blue peak of Resolution Island. Ahead of us, and to starboard, the sun was bobbing up behind a big berg.

Ferguson relieved me, and I went below to write up the log. I made an entry or two, and then, hardly realizing what I was doing, I picked up an old log-book and opened it at random.

This is what stared up at me, in the sprawling hand of Beef Hawkins:

September 22. Weather fair. Wind NE. hauling E. Course SE. by S. All sail on. Lat. 61° 0′ N., Lon. 61° 0′ W. at noon. Buried at sea this noon seaman known as "Calico," whom I shot and killed yesterday in self-defense. 8 P. M. Weather threatening. Reduced sail to single-reefed topsails.

"So this was the 'Calico' shooting-affair which happened some two years before, on the *Aurora's* last trip out of the Bay," I mused. I turned back to read the entry for the previous day, but half the leaf had been torn out, as were parts of other leaves, much as if some one had been hard up for pipe-lights.

Not feeling sleepy, I thought I'd take a turn about the deck and a smoke. The watch had finished scrubbing down, and were getting the royals and flying-jib set. I stopped under the lee of the galley to light my pipe, and noticed Kabendi at the door, sipping hot coffee.

A thought occurred to me. Manuel Silva, the ship's cook, had been with the *Aurora* for several voyages. Therefore 'twas more than likely that he knew something at first-hand about the shooting of Calico.

"Silva," said I as I stopped at the galley-door, "how comes it that you could make more than one voyage on a ship like this?"

The cook, an intelligent fellow for one of his class and breed, slid a tin of biscuit-dough into the oven, and slammed the door. Kabendi respectfully stepped back a pace or two as I put the question.

"Well, it's this way, sir," explained Silva, as he wiped his hands on his apron, and drew near the door. "I always knew that Cap'n Hawkins was a hard man, but that he never abused his cooks. Guess he's afraid the cook might put something in his tea if he did. I've been with him for the last three voyages. He gave me all the slush, and a good lay. *Somebody* had to cook for him; and as long 's I got good money for it, and he kept his hands and feet off me, I thought I'd stick with him."

"How about this shooting, last voyage?" I asked.

"'Twas murder, sir!" exclaimed the Portuguese, thumping the sliding door with his brown fist. "I was on deck at the time, and saw the whole business. Calico was goin' to cut himself a pipeful o' tabaccer, and the Old Man was watchin' him like a hawk. He'd no sooner got his knife out, than he got shot through the head."

"And didn't he leave any heirs to collect his share in the voyage?"

Silva shook his head, and peeped into the oven. "Nobody knew anything about him. He couldn't read, couldn't write. He couldn't even talk as much English as Kabendi there. 'Twas his first voyage out of N'Bedford—but he'd shore-whaled it in the Azores. He didn't come from the Islands, though, for none of the Portugee aboard could talk his language. Seems to me he was a full-blooded nigger from the West Coast, down Loanda way."

Considering that Silva was about one-fourth black himself, I thought that he was treading on rather delicate ground, especially with Kabendi but a few feet away.

At this juncture, I walked to the rail, to take a look at a big berg abreast of us, leaving the cook to attend to his biscuits. Scarcely had I turned my back, however, before Kabendi began to ply the cook with eager questions. I stood less than six feet distant, and overheard every word.

"Who say this Calico feller lib Loanda?" I heard him ask.

"That's where he told us he came from," the cook replied.

"What he look like?"

"Dark, very dark, like you; but he had white spots on his face and neck. That's why everybody called him 'Calico.' "

"Hab he round spot here?"

I turned to look at Kabendi in time to see him point to the center of his sloping black forehead.

Digitized by Google

"Yes," answered the cook, "a round spot about 's big as a silver dollar."

" 'Nother spot here?" The black forefinger traveled to the angle of the right jaw, and rested there.

"That's right; you must've known him. Where did——"

But the cook's question wound up with a squeak of alarm, for Kabendi had sprung into the galley and had him by the shoulders.

I was on the point of interfering, when the negro spoke again. His hoarse words held me rooted to the deck. He turned the left side of his coal-black head toward the frightened cook.

"Hab dat Calico feller one gol' ring in dis ear?" he roared.

Here he shook the cook, and paused to wet his thick lips.

"Hab him dat gol' ring? Hab him dat ring?" The furious negro fairly screamed the questions, and shook the quarter-breed until I thought his spine would snap.

"Yes—he did—did wear a r-ring," faltered the thoroughly scared cook, when Kabendi gave him a chance to answer. "Cap'n Hawkins took the ring out of his ear, 'fore he was buried," he added, when he'd gotten back some of his breath; "said 'twas bad luck to heave gold over——"

BUT Kabendi waited to hear no more. He dashed the cook from him, and darted out of the galley. I caught a glimpse of his face as he rushed by me—and I never want to see another face like that. There was an expression on it that reminded me of a time when I was ashore at Cameroon and saw some animal men changing a wounded, full-grown gorilla from one cage to another. Kabendi simply didn't look human.

He ran for'ard to the break of the poop, and faced the rising sun. I didn't know that he was a sun-worshiper, but he must have been one, for he faced the east, bowed his head and began some kind of a savage chant. His fists were clenched, and both arms raised straight above his woolly head. The loose sleeves of his dungaree blouse slipped down below his elbows, baring the massive black arms.

The watch on deck had finished getting the extra sails on the bark, and were gathered around the cooper's bench in the waist. They eyed Kabendi in surprise, wondering what was up. I saw Ferguson standing on the weather-side of the try-works, just beyond the men, and I was about to sing out to him—for what purpose I can't say—when I heard the crack of a pistol and a yell from somewhere aft.

I looked around the corner of the galley, and saw the helmsman lying flat on his back. Beef Hawkins was standing over him, a handcuff dangling from his left wrist and a smoking pistol in his right hand. I'd long since taken the ankle-irons off him.

I've never learned how he'd gotten loose—whether the sneaking Cockney steward helped him or not; and I can't imagine how he came to free his right hand. But there he was, as big as life, and as ugly as sin.

I felt for my pistol—the same pistol that I'd relieved Beef of—then I remembered that I'd left it below, in my reefer-pocket.

But Beef didn't tarry aft long. He had other fish to fry. He came for'ard—and he came a-shooting. He didn't see me where I stood behind the galley, and he passed right by, his wicked little eyes fixed upon the men in the waist.

Twice I heard him fire, and saw Ferguson fall to the deck at the second shot. But I saw this out of the tail of my eye, for by this time I was sprinting toward the cabin-companion, to get my pistol.

I jumped down the steep steps three at a time, and found my jacket hanging at the head of my bunk, just where I'd left it. But the pockets were empty! Beef had gotten back his pistol!

There weren't any firearms aboard the *Aurora*, so far as I knew, outside of the automatic pistol, some trade muzzle-loaders and the shotgun. So I dived into the after room and snatched up the breech-loader.

I broke it, and looked around for shells. For three precious minutes I hunted for them, without success. Then, feeling that a man's life might depend upon every minute I wasted, I decided to try to bluff the murderer with the empty gun.

I dashed up the companion, stepped over the body of the man near the wheel and ran for'ard—just as I heard the crack of the pistol again. As I got abreast of the galley, I could see over the poop. The men in the waist were standing still, with their hands up in the air, and a look of terror on their faces.

Beef had fired over their heads, to

Digitized by Google

intimidate them still further I suppose. I dare say his plan was to shoot Ferguson and me, then bribe or scare the remainder of the crew to keep their mouths shut, and help him work the bark back to New Bedford.

As I came abreast of the galley, I noticed the cook crouched down behind his range. Kabendi was nowhere in sight but, even as I got within thirty feet of the murderer, raised the empty shotgun and was on the point of calling out "Hands up!" the big negro appeared for'ard. He came on the run, clutching with both hands a heavy Pierce dart-gun.

Beef Hawkins saw him at the same moment. He took hasty aim and fired. He must have hit him, for Kabendi slowed up. Again and again the murderer fired at the advancing negro, as fast as he could press the trigger of the automatic.

I saw Kabendi's left arm drop to his side, and noticed blood upon his face. He came to a halt.

Again the murderer pulled the trigger, but without effect. The magazine was empty. He hurled the heavy weapon at Kabendi just as the negro raised his massive right arm and judged his distance.

By this time I had almost reached Beef. As I sprang toward him, I reversed the shotgun, ready to brain him with the butt of it. But, just as I raised the breech-loader and braced myself for a swing, the wounded black drew back his arm and let fly the dart-gun.

Before I could get in my blow, the awful whale-killing weapon struck Beef full in the chest.

There was a sickening sound as the barb of the harpoon crashed through the murderer's breast-bone.

In went the iron up to the eye—like a sheath-knife into a tin of rotten butter. Then the trigger-rod touched the flesh, and the hammer fell upon the nipple of the gun attachment. There was a flash and a roar as the copper bomb tore into Beef Hawkins. Kabendi must have stopped to cut the fuse at zero, for almost at the same instant the bomb exploded, and the giant powder literally tore the upper part of Hawkins's body to pieces.

I dropped my gun beside the shattered Thing that lay there, and hastened toward Kabendi. He was lying all crumpled up, near the try-works. Ferguson, shot through the arm, was bending over him, and all hands stood around with open mouths.

We laid the negro out on the cooper's bench, and I sent for the American flag and covered him with it, thinking that all was over with him. He was wounded in at least five places, but a bleeding hole just below and behind his left ear indicated the shot that had stopped him.

Meanwhile, all the sails were aback. Luckily, there wasn't much wind, and no bergs were close at hand. As soon as I got things straightened out somewhat, I bandaged Ferguson's wound. The steel-jacketed bullet had passed through the upper part of his arm, making a painful wound, although not necessarily a dangerous one. The shock was what had keeled him over.

The man that had been at the wheel, though, was as dead as Cæsar. There was a little blue hole just above his right eye, where Beef had shot him. I'd just ordered two of the watch to carry the body for'ard and lay it out on the forehatch, when somebody standing near the cooper's bench called out to me.

The flag draped over Kabendi was moving! I stripped it off as quick as I could and found the negro trying to turn on his side. After I'd gotten a roll of blankets under his head, and had given him a mouthful of rum, he opened his eyes and smiled at me—actually smiled at me—in spite of his terrible wounds. His lips moved.

I bent to listen to his words.

"Dat Calico feller—he been my brudder," he whispered painfully.

I turned away, half choked, as if some one had gripped me by the throat. But before I could give much thought to the matter, a hail came from aft.

"There's a steamer bearin' down on us, sir," reported the Englishman I'd appointed second mate.

SURE enough, just over our port quarter, and scarcely two miles off, a trim little hundred-tonner was overhauling us. We'd all been so much occupied with the strenuous happenings aboard the *Aurora* that nobody had noticed the stranger before.

She turned out to be the *Lady Franklin*, belonging to the Canadian Geological Survey. She'd wintered in Frobisher Bay in the interest of Science, and was fairly loaded down with naturalists, doctors,

Digitized by Google

geologists and all kinds of experts. She was bound for St. Johns.

After we'd spoken her, she sent off a couple of doctors. One of them fixed up Ferguson's arm in proper fashion, and the other gave his attention to Kabendi. I supposed his case was hopeless but, after the medical man had felt of the negro's pulse, and had examined his wounds, he whispered to me that his chance for life was as much as one out of six. The wound in his head was not as serious as I had supposed.

"If we can get him aboard the *Lady Franklin* alive, I'll be glad to take care of him," said the surgeon, after I'd given him the facts of the case.

No man was ever transshipped with greater care than was Kabendi. We rigged a stretcher and covered it with soft blankets from my own berth. Tenderly we laid the black fellow upon it, and lowered it into the steamer's yawl. There was hardly any sea running, on account of the floating ice around; and the delicate job was finished in good shape.

With dressings and bandages aboard for Ferguson, and with Kabendi in good hands, I felt relieved somewhat. Beef Hawkins now being out of the way, I had an idea that we might fetch port without any more tragedies.

The *Lady Franklin* steamed away to the southeastward, leaving us to nose along in her wake. I'm not a very godly man, I must admit, and I'm not given to praying, but long before that trim little steamer got hull down, I breathed a prayer to my Maker that Kabendi might live. It seemed a pity that he should go the way of his brother—and by the hand of the same man.

Promptly at midnight that night, I came on deck for a twofold purpose: to get our position from the pole-star, and to see to the burial of the dead. The second mate sat before the chronometer and jotted down the figures as I called them down through the cabin-skylight. This done, I left the working out of our position until I should go below again.

We buried the Russian-Finn that had been shot at the wheel and, as eight bells rang out, what was left of Beef Hawkins followed the body of his victim, down—somewhere. This done, I ordered the main-yard braced, and the *Aurora* kept on her course.

Ten or fifteen minutes later, I had our latitude and longitude worked out—using Sumner's method. "Sixty-one and no minutes north; sixty-one and no minutes west," I figured it—just one hundred and thirty-two miles east by south of Resolution Island. I could scarcely believe my own eyes, so I went over my figures again. I was right, however. It was just sixty-one degrees north, sixty-one degrees west. I got out the old log-book and soon found the page where the *Aurora's* former master had logged the burial of Calico.

Curiously enough, it was just as I recollected. The latitude and longitude agreed.

Beef Hawkins had been buried in approximately the same spot where the waters had closed over the head of the murdered negro!

THE balance of the voyage was uneventful. I might go on to tell of how we never proved anything against the Cockney steward in connection with the release of the murderer; how we realized a little over $100,000 for our cargo of oil, bone and ambergris; and of the goodly share which I received after the distant relatives of Beef Hawkins had finished squabbling over their windfall—but all these happenings are insignificant beside the following:

I'd just left the bank, after depositing a check in my favor for the very neat little sum of $18,420, and was heading toward the water-front to look over a whaling-schooner that I'd had my eye on for about a month, when I was hailed from across the street.

I lost no time in crossing over, for I recognized both the voice and its owner. It was Kabendi, as black as life, and nearly as strong as ever, in spite of some ugly scars. The Canadian doctors had helped him win his fight to live, and his magnificent physique and stamina had played their part. Warmly I shook him by the hand, before leading him to the Probate Court, for he had a claim of his own to collect.

In due time I purchased the whaling-schooner *Venus*, and have since sailed her myself. And as for Calico's brother—he's a part owner, and my first mate.

Digitized by Google

THE UNBELIEVERS

By George Vaux Bacon

ON A fourth-floor-back room, looking out upon a rusty fire-escape and a stifling August night, Mamie Calhoun was getting ready for bed.

Mamie was not beautiful, as the Greeks reckoned beauty, as her nose was too short, there were tired lines about her brows and her hair was that strawy color that people consider indigenous to chorus-ladies. But her eyes were like the blue of the Irish lakes.

Standing in a hot bargain-basement, selling notions to irritable customers, makes one's feet sore. Mamie sat with her chair tilted back, her bare feet against the cool iron of the bed, combing her hair the one hundred strokes prescribed by the beauty specialist of the *Tribune* as a nightly performance for young women who would keep their tresses beautiful.

On the raised window-pane were a couple of newly washed handkerchiefs, stretched to dry, and, on a string stretched from one of the posts at the foot of the bed to the cracked mirror in the bureau, was a shirt-waist, also drying.

While she combed her hair Mamie energetically chewed the piece of gum she had just rescued from its day's rest under the bottom of the chair on which she sat. She used one wad of chewing-gum for the day and another for the night, being a daughter of kings and inclined to be aristocratic.

Mamie was glad when the one hundred strokes were finished. One has to keep up appearances in Chicago; but one's elbow gets weary about bedtime, after ten odd hours in the bargain-basement, and occasional reflections on the subject of the ease with which the six dollars a week one receives for one's labor can be quadrupled if one is willing to compromise somewhat.

Her employer put his dollar in the plate every Sunday morning, after figuring up his week's profits on his cuff during the sermon, so that worries of a pecuniary nature, as well as of conscience that might have arisen from Mamie's business connection with him, naturally belonged to her.

SHE peeled off her underclothing, cast an indifferent glance through the open window at the fire-escape, replaced the gum under the chair and, draping her cheap nightgown over her tired

Digitized by Google

young body, was about to extinguish the forked and flickering gas-jet, when over the window-sill appeared the pale and dirt-streaked face of a man with a vizored cap drawn down over his eyes.

With her hand still on the gas-cock, Mamie stood still and stared at him. Following the face, whose sharp eyes kept themselves fixed on Mamie, a dirty-shirted, dusty-trousered figure emerged from the night and cautiously stepped into the room.

Mamie's father had been drunk and disorderly frequently, and finally to his ruin. But a large block of territory along West Twelfth Street can still testify as to his prowess as a brave man and a fighter.

"You're in the right dump for a pile of rich swag," she remarked. "What d'you want to start on first? The handkerchiefs?"

"I ain't here to steal nothin', lady," said the intruder in a lifeless tone. "I'm hidin', that's all. Don't scream."

"Don't worry, Raffles. I won't scream. If I was the screamin' kind I'd be sprinklin' myself with a toy waterin'-can in Dunning thinkin' I was a peony, right now. Who are you hidin' from? I s'pose your little cousin has been chasin' you to borrow a penny for candy, eh?"

"Aw, you know what's the matter," he said, his voice gaining a little more animation from Mamie's self-possession and apparent disinclination to cry for help.

"Where're the bulls?" she asked.

"Down 'n the alley," he answered.

"What you been up to?"

"Aw, I tried to jerk a bunch o' silver plate out o' old Gatz's shack, an' the butler caught me an' set up a squeal. I busted him one in the kisser an' oozed out o' the pantry-winder jest as Baldy Meyers, the cop, breaks through the kitchen-door an' makes a dive fer me."

"Gatz, eh?" commented Mamie, lost in thought. "That's the guy I works for."

"Well, turn me over t' the bulls then, an' get a raise in yer salary or a long vacation with pay. I'm through with this here game, an' I'm tired. I don't care whether I go to the cooler fer a while or not."

The hopeless note came back into his voice. He sat down on the edge of the window and rested his head in his hands. Mamie let go of the gas with a sudden realization of her dishabille and, reaching for a shattered kimono that hung on a hook by the head of the bed, wrapped herself up in it. She sat on the edge of the bed and looked at the burglar.

He was a youngster—couldn't be over twenty-one. The mother was very near the surface in Mamie's poor little city-hardened heart, and it took less than one would imagine to reach it. This poor boy, with all his toughness, pursued by the police, the hereditary enemy of all the ninety and nine, needed help. The coming day was Saturday, the longest, hardest day in the week, and the weather was stifling hot; but she closed her eyes a moment wearily, then, opening them, said:

"I believe you. You stay right here, an' the bulls 'll get tired o' hanging around here waitin' for you, after a while, an' you can go."

"You're a good kid," said the burglar.

"Listen here," said Mamie. "I've worked for Gatz for six years. Every Saturday night he pries open my pink an' dainty fist with a cold-chisel an' shoves in six bucks with the admonition to be a good girl. If I was to march you down to the bulls for him, he'd give me a week's vacation, mebbe, an' I could take a trip to Michigan City on the *Theodore Rosenvelt* an' lap up some beer an' cheese sandwiches an' go back to the job feelin' worse 'n I do now. Stay here all night, if you wanna. I ain't a graduate o' Vassar. I never seen the inside of a limousine automobile in my life except from the outside. So I'll sit here an' watch you. When you think it's safe, you can beat it an' I'll turn out the gas an' hit the hay."

The burglar stared at her a few minutes. Then he got up and put one foot out of the room, over the sill.

"Believe me," he said over his shoulder, "I'd just as soon steal a nickel off a dead man's eye, 'cause I got more use fer a nickel than any dead man ever had. But I ain't goin' ter steal yer sleep. I ain't no murderer nor highway robber," and he disappeared.

WITH a sigh Mamie turned out the gas and crept into bed. She lay awake a few minutes, expecting to hear a scuffle in the alley. But there was no noise except the hum of distant street-cars on Clark Street, and she fell into a sleep of utter exhaustion.

How good a week's vacation and a trip down to Michigan City on the *Theodore*

Digitized by Google

Roosevelt would have been! She dreamed of it for a while, then of a boy that looked like the burglar coming back out of darkness into his mother's arms.

The alarm-clock tumbled her out of bed at six—burglar and trip to Michigan City forgotten. She went sleepy-eyed downtown, picked her day's gum from under the counter in the notions department and prepared, with all the hauteur she could command, which was a good deal, to face another day.

The sun blazed hotter and hotter. A humid haze hung over the city. State Street, with its hurrying thousands, was like a huge Turkish bath under a sky hidden behind a film of vapor. From the southwest a hot breath crept over the sweltering populace.

The basement under the blistering pavement, where Mamie worked, was an oven. People seem to choose the hottest days of the year on which to go shopping in droves and, as though in recognition of that fact, the department store in which Mamie worked usually planned a big sale when it looked as though it was going to be an extra hot day.

Chewing gum as hard as she could to keep her temper under control and wiping the perspiration back into her hair, Mamie struggled with the bargaining women at her counter like a general in a beleaguered town, cynical, rude, domineering, yet selling vast quantities of the goods thereon, for Mamie was an excellent saleswoman.

At lunch-time the floor-walker, Harold S. Entwater, approached her with a card and told her to report to Mr. Gatz, in his office on the seventh floor. Mamie rang out on the time-clock and, card in hand, took an elevator to the office of her boss.

Mr. Gatz sat ponderously at his flat mahogany desk reading correspondence from drummers on the road, who cursed him but sold his goods.

"Are you Mamie Calhoun?" he asked in a blatant voice.

"Yes, sir," said Mamie.

He stared at her.

"Read that," he said, and handed her a slip of paper.

She read:

Deer Mr. Gatz, Im the fellow that broke into your hous an tride to get your plate an was chasd out by the butlers afterward. I got away an wud hav stole the swag anniway only for Mamy Calhoon who works for you. she got me two cut it out. Im on the square now an Id like to hav you do somthing for her she saved your silver

yrs

THE SHRIMP

Mamie handed it back to him.

"What have you to say about this?" asked Mr. Gatz, unconsciously imitating the ministerial manner of the pastor of his church.

"Nothin'," said Mamie, true to her clan, and non-committal.

"How does it happen that you know him?" came from Mr. Gatz incisively.

Mamie told him what had happened.

"A very likely story," he commented when she finished.

"How's that, sir?" asked Mamie.

"I said I don't believe you!" shouted Mr. Gatz. "Don't you think I can see through this tale? I have a good mind to lock you up! I didn't think I had an associate and mistress of thieves in my store!"

Mamie's Irish soul flared.

"You can't lock me up, Mr. Gatz. Nothing was stolen. I told you just what happened and nothing more. That's all I have to say, and I won't be insulted by you nor nobody else, see?"

"Shut up!" roared Mr. Gatz.

The memory of the fact that the burglar's appearance had scared him into a palpitating jelly of pale, perspiring flesh, rendered him valorously aggressive against Mamie. It also caused him to forget the English acquired since the days of his prosperity.

"You go down an' tell the cashier to give you your time, d'you hear? An' don't come around here no more at all, y' understand? Get out!"

With flaming face, but holding her tongue, Mamie went out.

The Shrimp's letter of recommendation had given her a vacation all right; but without pay.

MAMIE walked the blistering sidewalks of Chicago looking for a job. Every one was being laid off, and the times were bad. There was an oversupply of shop-girls. Anybody can be a shop-girl. Chicago seemed teeming with salesladies. Mamie looked well dressed and neat and kept herself fairly cool-looking by generous use of her powder rag on her nose, and one would have thought it easy for her to get a job.

Digitized by Google

No job came, however. There are times when they don't. Then, one gets hungry. Those are the times when one can stand at the corner of Randolph and Clark and realize that the midnight city is a private hell tuned to the diapason of the elevated crashing along the Loop at Lake Street, punctuated by the staccato whir of taxicabs fleeing toward Michigan Avenue and lit with electric musical-comedy signs.

So one night seemed to Mamie. She walked down Randolph to State, passing by a fruit-stand where thousands of oranges and bananas were displayed, and turned south on State, looking into the windows of the stores. Her landlady had locked her out of her room, and all that she owned in the world was the clothes she had on her back, her reticule, her powder-rag and the clause in the Constitution of the United States entitling her to the pursuit of happiness.

The terror and despair of the hungry in the great city, the loneliness of being one of millions, were upon her. People passed her, talking and laughing and scarcely glancing at her. She dragged herself along. The weather was still stifling hot. She could not think; but she should have been glad of that.

"WHY, hello, kid!" Some one came up and walked beside her. The thrill of the hungry and lonely at the sound of a familiar voice rang through her being. She looked around. It was the Shrimp.

"Why, hello, I'm glad you got away all right," she said, in a listless voice.

"Thanks, Kid." The Shrimp had noted the listless tone and hesitated a moment. He slanted his hat and continued:

"Where're you goin'?"

"Oh, I dunno," she answered dully.

"Say, yer workin' fer Gatz, ain't yer?"

"No; I was," said Mamie, too worn out to make explanations.

"I don't believe you ever was," said the Shrimp, gaining courage. "Say, I found out from the housemaid next mornin' at that house you was in what yer name was, an' I wrote Gatz a letter tellin' him how you saved his silver. I could 'a' gone back an' copped it easy after I left you. You'd be on a vacation now if you'd 'a' been workin' there. Gee, ain't I the innocent young turtle-dove, though!"

He laughed merrily. She was a slick chicken, all right.

Mamie looked at him keenly. He was well dressed now, according to the standard of her experience, and wore a gay cloth hat at a foxy angle. He looked as though he had some money, too.

They reached Madison Street and she paused slightly in her walk. Have you ever been hungry on the night streets of Chicago with no place to go, and just met some one you know who appears to have some money? No? You haven't any idea then what the word Hope, with a capital H, means.

"How'd you like to have somethin' t' eat?" asked the Shrimp.

"Where at?" she asked.

"Oh, round the corner, at Fillson's," he said.

"All right."

They turned off at Madison Street and went into a restaurant gay with vari-colored lights, famous in every court-room in Illinois.

The waiter showed them to a table in a booth.

"How'd you like to have a cocktail first, Kid?" asked the Shrimp.

"I don't drink," said Mamie.

The Shrimp laughed gaily, and produced a wad which he flourished under Mamie's eyes.

"Don't come that on me, Kid. I'm wise, an' I got the dough. But I ain't sayin' nothin', see? I know yer don't work fer old Gatz, and I don't believe you ever did. But you saved me from the bulls, and the Shrimp don't never split on a pal, nor ferget a favor. I'm goin' ter treat yer right, and I want yer to have a swell feed wid all the trimmin's."

The bird of prey leaned over the table with the gleam of admiration of one marauder for another in his eye. Mamie was nifty-looking, in spite of a distinct pallor. The Shrimp settled into his chair and smiled encouragingly at her.

"Oh, all right. Give me a Martini," she said.

A cocktail isn't much. Mamie had seen swell ladies drink them—but she forgot that the swell ladies were not three-quarters starved when they drank them. However, if she had refused, the Shrimp might have gotten sore and ditched her, and she had to eat.

Never having been half dead with hunger,

Digitized by Google

you can scarcely realize what a Martini will do to one in such a condition. Dropping a cocktail on a perfectly empty stomach is like dropping a trip-hammer on a pound of dynamite. Try it and see.

Mamie gave a good exhibition of the reason why the thoughtful proprietor of Fillson's provided tables in booths for many of his lady guests. A telegraph-operator of the Combined Press, who was drinking dollar champagne out of water-goblets in another corner, could just succeed in bellowing higher than her shrill voice by the time things closed up and the city ordinance demanded that Mamie and the Shrimp leave and go out on the streets.

Arm in arm, they walked gaily but unsteadily down the street. No more was the city a hell of unknown terrors to Mamie. A stomach strong by inheritance drew only exhilaration from the liquor she had been drinking. The world was rosy and glad. Every one was smiling. Hilariously they waved at people who stood on the street corners and laughed at them. The crossing-cops grinned as they helped them across the streets. The world was human again, and everybody was a good old pal under the electric lights and the twinkling signs.

The Shrimp hugged her close to him. After a while he whispered in her ear. She looked at him, smiling an assent, and, looking into her eyes, he saw that they shone like stars.

AS THE dramatists say: "Time: Two years after."

It was Mamie the bulls got first. Her eyes were not like stars when the woman probation-officer asked her:

"Don't you know that there are men and women who wish you well and want to help you?"

The girl that had been Mamie looked at the well-meaning woman and laughed the shrill, loud laugh of the gutter.

"Quit yer kiddin'," she said.

The woman stared at her. Her expression reminded Mamie of that of a cripple at the Clark Street Bridge whom she had given a silver dollar of her earnings the day before she was pinched. It was an expression of ludicrous, almost painful surprise. The good lady told the judge that Mamie was "quite impossible," and Mamie went up for thirty days, for the good of Society.

The Shrimp got twenty years a month afterward for holding a couple of plain-clothes men at bay while his pals made a getaway from a safe-cracking job that was tipped off to the police. He had been offered immunity for turning State's evidence, and had laughed at the judge.

THE Recording Angel reached wearily up to the top shelf for the Book of Unbelief and, blowing a light film of star-dust from the cover, laid it on his desk and opened it.

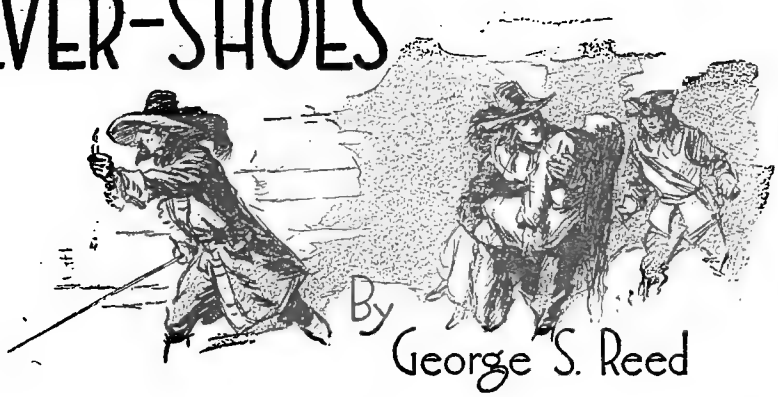
He ran his finger down the index, stopped, then turning to the page headed "Mr. Gatz," looked at it rather quizzically. The large credit-items of going to church regularly on Sunday seemed, nevertheless, to leave this account with a heavy debit. The Angel frowned and bit his pen.

Then he turned to another account headed "The Shrimp," which always persisted in balancing. He gave a shrug.

He turned to another account headed "Mamie Calhoun." He studied it long and patiently. The debit items that came in daily on his sin-ticker against this account were heavy, yet the account invariably showed a good credit at the end of every month. The Angel went up and down the columns with his finger-nail, and even tried out the figures on his adding-machine, but finally closed the book and replaced it without making a change. Those accounts always puzzled him, somehow.

Digitized by Google

SILVER-SHOES



By George S. Reed

SYNOPSIS—Roderick Marley, having killed in a duel a Buckingham retainer, is smuggled out of England, on a ship bound for Jamaica, by his powerful brother, Sir George, to bring back the daughter of Dudley, a Cromwellian general, betrothed when a child to Sir George. Dudley, banished, has taken his daughter to Jamaica and vanished. From his buckles Roderick is named "Silver-Shoes" by Shattuck, a buccaneer returning to Jamaica. At Port Royal, Silver-Shoes buys the freedom of a lad, Romeo, raised by pirates, and an admirer of Shakespeare. Silver-Shoes finds General Dudley a mutilated imbecile, called "Blunt-Nose," and kept by the buccaneers. Silver-Shoes overhears Shattuck and the famous Morgan plot to capture Panama with the connivance of the English king. Dudley betrays to Silver-Shoes that his daughter Margot is in Panama and he himself only shamming imbecility. Silver-Shoes joins the expedition. Blunt-Nose explains that a Spanish lad, his fellow-prisoner, has aided Margot to escape to Spanish friends in Panama. Romeo casts his lot with Silver-Shoes. At the capture of Chagres, near the present Colon, Silver-Shoes aids the escape of Don Pedro de Luna, father of the Spanish lad, and Shattuck suspects him. The pirates march through jungles to Panama, risking ambush and starvation, and take the city after a hot fight against odds. Silver-Shoes wins Sir Henry Morgan's favor by his coolness before the fight, and by leading a brilliant cavalry charge. Meantime, Margot, whom Silver-Shoes is questing, has fled from Panama with her patroness, the Señora Alvarez, to escape the looting pirates.

CHAPTER XX

I PURSUE A MAN

THE hour of rest spent on the savanna before Panama, amid the bodies of slain comrades and Spaniards, groans of the wounded and confused cries of many people hastily preparing to repel our attack from the city walls, passed all too soon.

Somewhat weary, but with quickened hope and fresh spirit, we formed companies and relighted our matches. The few horses were tethered some distance away, not to be used again until the walls had been surmounted and the gates opened.

The sun was directly overhead and showering us pitilessly with fearful heat, when the order came to advance. With sweat pouring in streams we rushed forward over the plain, following the ladders and attacking the walls in divers places.

For two hours the battle raged. The Spaniards knew that the victor of the wall was master of all within, and fought desperately. Their cannon had been placed covering the roadway, therefore were useless; but small arms, aided by huge caldrons of steaming water and burning pitch, drove us back time after time, and our ladders, each so broad four men could rush upward abreast, were hacked out of their prongs and thrown after us.

Finally, our attempt was successful, but as we were racing toward the top, protected by two score sharpshooters, a huge stone crashing down struck Romeo a wicked though glancing blow on his helmet. As he toppled I caught him, for a fall to the turf would have been fatal. Throwing him over my shoulder like a bag of maize, I staggered on.

My steps made slower, the horde of eager, yelling freebooters swarmed by. When I reached the parapet they had formed a half-circle with their backs to the ladder, and were cutting into a mass of suddenly timorous men.

Dropping Romeo in safety near-by, and

Digitized by Google

building a barricade of two fallen Spaniards about him as a shelter from spent bullets, I gripped my sword and ran to a place where the fight was thickest.

But once upon the wall the day was ours, for shortly afterward our foes had either been slain, pushed over into the paved streets below, or had thrown down their arms and run away.

At divers quarters the freebooters were masters of the walls, and soon I heard the boom of heavy guns and saw solid shot demolish a fine residence, towering above the others not far away, from whose casements we were being fired upon. This revealed the welcome news that the gates had been forced and the big guns taken.

With a score of freebooters I ran along the parapet to an incline leading to the street, and thence, by a broad, well-paved way, to the city gates and the cannon, which were surrounded by a large body of pirates, directed by the pirate chief, who from his bedraggled appearance had done some heavy fighting. They were busied with the big guns, hauling them to command several avenues and many of the most formidable residences.

Shattuck came from behind and, pointing to the shattered gates, bade me get my troop of horse, so, with a score of followers, we raced for our mounts. Through the impatience of the few who had been guarding them, and who wished to get into active work, they had, like curiosity-seekers, approached nearer and nearer, so we scarce passed the wall ere they were before us.

The crowd about the entrance, half choked by thick smoke, gave a yell of delight as we clattered by and rode down the streets in search of opposition. Other bands had entered different parts of the city. We could hear the screaming and musket-shooting. Toward those sounds we made way, dodging missiles from the housetops and riding swiftly to make their aim uncertain.

'Twas but a moment's work to dash up to a group of ten or twelve freebooters surrounded by thrice as many Spaniards and scatter the foe from their rear. Gradually organized resistance was quelled, but desultory firing from casements and roofs took a much longer time to subdue, and was attended by greater danger. Finally, in late afternoon, this was effectively ended, and Morgan, placing a picked guard about the cannon, allowed the rest to seek first fruits of our victory.

My horse was well-nigh spent when I drew rein in the Praca dos Romulares, amidst orange- and pimento-trees, keeping within their protection to render uncertain the aim of any one, lurking unsubdued within the barred and bolted houses about the square, who might fancy a pot-shot. From upper windows I could see scores of terrified faces disappearing, instant I saw them.

Besides myself and another lone freebooter, busy before the Governor's house with a heavy hammer, knocking the gold ornamentation from a pair of lions over the entrance, the square was devoid of life.

I walked my horse to and fro, listening to the sounds of pillage from all directions, intermingled with screams and cursing, the report of muskets and the occasional boom of heavier metal. Hopefully I waited for some stray Spaniard who would be able to tell the whereabouts of Don Pedro de Luna, or the home of the Alvarez. I had carefully treasured this name ever since Dudley, in that one minute of reason, gave it me.

The square was central and the freebooters were working their way toward it from the gates, thereby driving opposition before them, and those who survived had to cross here to gain further protection. In that event, when it came, I could gather in one of these fleeing foes and gain such information.

The light began to fade and I knew the signal of recall to the gates would be given, ere long. As yet no Spaniard had crossed the square. One poor fellow lay beneath a pimento-tree, huddled in a sleep everlasting. The freebooter by the Governor's house came staggering past with several strips of the yellow, suggesting I accompany him to the gates, but I shook my head. And now I was left absolutely alone.

ALMOST at the point of seeking an entrance to one of the dwellings where there were people in plenty within—a foolhardy attempt, which would have met with deserved death—there came a noise down one of the cross-traverses. I walked my horse to a point in the grove, where I perceived a man running toward me, pursued at some distance by a number of buccaneers.

Digitized by Google

He ran fast and I sought a position to intercept him. I noted that a Spaniard in the corner house, whose casements looked both into the square and down the side street, had knowledge of my intention, and was resting his musket upon the open ledge with a burning match in his hand, to take a shot at me when his brother-in-arms drew near.

This caused a change in plans, for a man with a musket resting upon a casement, and waiting patiently, is a much better marksman than when in the heat of battle and upon open savanna. And the desire to live was strong; not alone for the sake of life itself, but for the pursuance of my brother's trust, which needed more vigilance now than ever. Among Spaniards she was safe; among pirates, soaked in wine and sotted with vice and torture, stopping at naught—God help her!

So I wheeled away amid the trees, and at that moment the fleeing foe darted into the square and leaned panting upon a bench for a moment ere continuing his flight. I jumped from my horse and crept toward him, when a shout from the window caused him to look quickly in my direction. Then he swung off across the square.

I took after him with all speed. There followed the report of a musket and a burning sensation stung my back, which evidently came from a flesh-wound, as it did not hinder. Then we passed down the side street beyond range.

The alley was as deserted as the square, and the houses bolted and shuttered. A horse lay in the gutter, which ran midway down the street, as is Spanish custom, and near-by were three fallen Spaniards and one of the freebooters, a man of my troop, who had given good account of his prowess ere he was at last killed.

The Spaniard ahead turned and, perceiving the short distance 'twixt us, tried to increase his speed, but was too far spent.

He darted up the steps of one of the dwellings and fumbled with the locks. This delay reduced the distance between us, so that when I ran up after him he was but passing within the door. Ere he could close it, I threw my weight and pushed it open.

He turned to face me, upon a broad staircase, ready to drop with exhaustion, but willing to sell his life dear.

I sprang upon him and caught the sweep of his thin rapier on my own, turning it one side, preparatory to thrust his sword-arm, for he was too precious an object to kill. But ere the stroke was made he dropped his weapon and held out his hand.

"My friend of Chagres! God be thanked! I surrender to you gladly."

I stepped back. "You are——" I stammered hesitatingly.

"Don Pedro de Luna, and this is the House of the Silvered Dove—the home of Alvarez."

I gave a cry of joy.

"And the maid?" I exclaimed.

There were sounds in the street of men running and shooting. I knew they were close upon us. Dropping my own blade, I rushed to the door and swung it to. One chain and then another I laced across the heavy panels, and then swung several large iron bars in place.

The Don sank heavily upon the stairs, wiping the moisture from his face with a sleeve of his torn and frayed suit of velvet. He too had done some strenuous work that day.

Then came a crash upon the door, followed by others and screams of rage.

"Open! —— ye, ye vermin, ye dog, ye coward! Siller-Shoes, ha' ye got 'im? Open the door!"

Don Pedro arose.

"Thank Heaven we are met, señor," he said.

A furious attack upon the door prevented my answer. I tiptoed to his side.

"They'll be within ere long," I whispered warningly.

"Nay, 'tis Peruvian wood, well-seasoned."

"But they will," I repeated. "Come up-stairs—any place save here. I must talk with you."

He turned instantly, and together we ran upward, into a room awe-inspiring by its rich magnificence. It seemed like the ante-chamber to our King, and all that was needed, to make the illusion complete, was the presence of courtiers.

The Don dropped into a chair beside a wondrous table encrusted with precious stones. I sheathed my sword and, spying a chalice of pure gold upon the rug, picked it up and laid it upon the table-top.

"Where are they—the Alvarez and the maid?"

Digitized by Google

"Not here, señor; at Teneriffe."

"Teneriffe!" I exclaimed. "Where is Teneriffe?"

"Seven hours' journey down the bay."

"Seven hours! Zooks, man, the distance is too short for safety. Better to have remained within Panama!"

Tearing of wood and yells of exultation came from below. They had found a beam from some neighboring dwelling, and the heavy pounding on the panels was having effect.

"I must tie you, and quickly," I said. "Your confidence in the door is misplaced. Remember, Don Pedro de Luna, you are *my* prisoner."

I ran to the tapestry and wantonly ripped away several shreds of cloth.

"Whatever haps, see to it you give not your right name," I added, hastily tying his wrists behind him. "The man who holds your son for ransom is with us. Once he found who you are, despite their customs, he would take you from me, and," I hesitated, "I need you."

"Your thought is followed, señor. This man is called Shattuck?"

"Aye."

"I have had communication with him," continued the Don, "and have offered thrice to pay ransom, but he will not hear of it save I bring the sum in person. That I dare not do."

"Such does not smack of Shattuck as I know him," I answered in surprise. "Gold is his god. Doth he give reasons?"

"None."

"'Twould seem he wished to trap you."

"*Si, señor.* So I have thought."

I turned to him suddenly.

"Your son had an uncle at Chagres?"

The Spaniard knotted his hands and looked away. "*Si, señor,*" he said in a low voice. "My brother. He was Governor."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, my mind going back to the scene in the wine-room, Shattuck as judge and executioner, the unfortunate Governor as culprit. "I have it now. Listen, Don Pedro. This man Shattuck hath a grievance 'gainst your brother which is deeper in his nature even than love of gold. He means to wipe out your entire family, 'tis plain—another reason, one much greater, why you must keep secret your real identity. Ye gods, what a man!"

HERE he could answer, a loud crash warned us the door had given way. They came sweeping up the stairs, exultant, screaming, cursing. Ripping down the costly tapestry, they rushed into the room; six of them, headed by Lollie Hatton, blood-lust in their eyes, and weapons stained with carnage and butchery.

My presence alone saved the Don from instant and horrible death. He had given them unusual trouble and they were thirsting for satisfaction, but contented themselves with taunts and threats till Lollie pointed his cutlass.

"What d' ye say, Siller-Shoes?"

"Let be—a prisoner of note. I want his ransom."

He looked at me uncertainly, and then, shrugging his shoulders, turned away, but from the group came a growl of anger, and for a moment it seemed as if naught could stay their desire.

Then one of them seized upon the golden chalice with a scream of delight, and, like children, the others followed suit, snatching all things of value, ripping the paintings, and sounding the walls for secret places; all save Lollie, who stood silent a few paces away, watching me.

And as for myself, my muscles relaxed, legs became unsteady, and I would have fallen had not the pirate caught me. The romping of the weird creatures and the calm features of the Spaniard blended together. My sword I could not feel, and myriads of black specks swept before me, ending in a film of density and darkness.

CHAPTER XXI

SHATTUCK GLARES

WHEN I awoke, I was in a large room richly decorated with Spanish curtains and Flemish paintings, and upon a bed marvelously soft and yielding, while looking down at me was Romeo. He gave a sigh of relief and, dropping a damp cloth with which he had been smoothing my forehead, ran into the adjoining chamber.

A moment later he returned, bringing Don Pedro, who seemed pleased at the recovery, and felt of my pulse and forehead with the practised air of a ship's surgeon. To all this I said naught, feeling strangely weak, and wondering at the quantity of

Digitized by Google

cloths wrapped about me and at the pain which gnawed my back.

"Y' had a close call, Silver-Shoes," said Romeo, sitting down by me, while Don Pedro, after several moments of indecision whether to stay or no, left the room, limping with evident pain.

"And you were lying on the wall. How came you here?" I replied, in a voice far away

"Y' may well ask. Leaving me with two dead Dons, to be carted off next day as one of them to a deep pit beyond the city. Had I not winked an eye, y' would have lost a faithful friend. I doubt not I owe ye my life, comrade, but next time use more care of me."

"How long have I been here?"

"Scarce an hour, but y' have been bewitched four days. We have moved ye thrice, because of the fire which rages along the water-front. See the smoke clouds."

He pointed toward the open casements, through which I perceived a black curtain rising high and wide in the sky. "Morgan is wild, and says 'tis the work of the Spanish Governor, who can not be found. But we'll get him. How does my brave Apollo?"

"The hurt in my back. How came it there?"

"A stray slug which hath passed within you beyond reach. We thought 'twas mortal, at least so says the doctor."

I remembered the Spaniard in the corner house, his careful aim, and wondered no longer.

Romeo bent down and jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Who is he?" he whispered.

"You mean my prisoner?"

He straightened up with a sigh of relief.

"'Tis right, then. Faith, he hath had a merry maying. When ye dropped, they were for killing him. Lollie took y' part and 'twas finally decided to take him before Morgan. The dog swore he belonged to ye, but Morgan placed him with the rest in the Cathedral. Yester morn he was examined and gave a false name. Then his feet went to the fire, and the rest of him also had I not chanced by, and hearing Red Dick chaff him about his loyalty to you, of course I took a hand. It made a great bowl of hot trouble, and for the second time he was taken before Morgan. E'en then I would have lost him, had I not swore you were getting well, which was a thing I hoped for but knew not.

"The result is, ye are to hold him for two thousand pieces of eight, one-half of which goes to Morgan. If ye die, he is to be put to the fire again. With that I carried him to your side and, having some knowledge of medicaments, he hath taken charge. We had another dispute over him an hour past with Shattuck, who, methinks, is anxious for your death, whereby he will gain those silver buckles. He caught sight of the Spaniard while we were moving you hither, put questions to him which were not answered, and hath given him an hour to think on't, otherwise 'tis farewell to the dog."

"He knows the prisoner is mine?"

"Aye, I told him."

"Well——"

Romeo hesitated.

"It matters not, Silver-Shoes. When Shattuck makes up his mind, 'tis best to step aside."

I raised myself to put forth a leg from the fine linen, but the room swam and I sank back with a groan.

"Tell him to come here," I said weakly, and a moment later Don Pedro was looking down at me, while Romeo stood by the casement, a silent, albeit curious, spectator.

"I doubt whether or no I can save you, my friend," I said, still dizzy. "But be here when Shattuck comes and let me speak with him. Can aught be done for me? My head swims."

He forced a liquid down my throat and recommenced bathing my temples. Under this soothing, objects about finally remained stationary, and sight was once again a blessing. Then he bolstered me to a sitting posture.

"How can we get to Teneriffe, Don Pedro?" I asked, and added, because of his hesitation, "You may talk freely. Romeo is of us."

"There lies no need to visit Teneriffe, señor. The señorita—is here in Panama!"

"*Here!*"

He nodded.

"But you said she had fled with the Alvarez to a place seven hours distant. Whence came she? Have they caught her?"

Again the Spaniard nodded.

"She did go to Teneriffe with Señora Alvarez," he said slowly, "but Archbishop Perez, a very pious and worthy servant of God, was put to the torture by—by your

Digitized by Google

comrades, and revealed the flight of our ship, the *Santa Maria*, containing the vestments of our church and the valuables of merchants. This vessel sailed past Teneriffe, and his Eminence knowing the fact, when he found your comrades would pursue, also said that at Teneriffe was a vast estate belonging to the Alvarez, well stocked with gold and jewels, which they could easily take on the way. Hence it came that at Teneriffe they paused long enough to search the estate, drink the wines, and were forced to remain overnight because of their condition. Then there was naught to do in the morning but to return, which they did, bringing Señora Alvarez and the señorita with them. That is how she came to Panama. She and the good Señora Alvarez were taken before your Captain, who hath placed them apart from the others, in a house near his own, where they live sumptuously, although in close confinement."

"Why the distinction?"

"'Tis said your Captain fancies the señorita."

I looked at him in amazement.

"Morgan! Faith, you must be mistaken."

The Spaniard made no reply, but turned toward the casement, his face serious and waxen.

"Romeo!" I said sharply. "Can this be true?"

The lad came slowly forward, his face grown brave and his mind for once sober.

"'Tis true two women have been brought from an island down the bay, one of whom is young, possessed of beauty, and fancied by Morgan. Silver-Shoes, is *she* Dudley's daughter?"

"Aye," I answered, absently tearing the linen about me in perplexity.

"Alas!" he exclaimed mournfully. "What can we do?"

"Do!" I ejaculated. "The first thing is to take her from them, and speedily, ere it be too late."

"From *Morgan?*"

"Aye, from the devil himself, were 't necessary."

"YE WOULD defy Shattuck, Morgan, any or *all* of us to gain the maid?"

His voice expressed an astonishment which irritated me.

"For sure would I! Have I been these weeks and months toiling hence, amid starvation and human offal, to be denied because the king of our foul herd stands in my way? Go to, lad. What is wrong with you? Art with me?"

He shook his head.

"Nay, not in this. Y' are new with the Brotherhood, and can not understand them. I have been through the fight at Maracaibo, Puerto Bello and many others, and I know them well. I dare not help in such a doing."

"All of which sounds well for one who, upon a hillock before Panama, swore to give his life thrice over for this very maid," I said sneeringly. "Are you a coward?"

He nodded gravely.

"I may be so. In this I am, for certes." He turned toward me swiftly. "My future lies in this venture, and now it seems assured. I will do for ye all I can within reason. That much I owe, plus twelve pound, but I am working for a maid also, who is of necessity more precious to me than Dudley's daughter. There is hope of return and gold pieces, do I remain true to the Brotherhood. There is no hope save death, do I follow ye in such folly. Morgan is seeking his ends by fair means. Perchance a new face may come in sight whereby——"

"You are a coward," I cried, raising my finger and pointing toward the door. "I bought you, 'tis true, but I would not own you now for all the Harry Angels in the world. Begone, I say. I want you no more."

He started to speak, but mumbled without meaning and then turned away. Halfway to the next room, wherein was his armor and weapons, he paused again and looked back at me, but my face was blazing. Then he disappeared beyond, where I heard the half-hearted rattle of steel. There was a look in his large eyes as of a dog who had been struck an unjust blow by his master. The muscles of his face twitched and his lips quivered.

I was now without any one who could help me and the task was more difficult than before. And alas! crippled, helpless, in bed and unable to move, while onward passed precious minutes, hours, days, with the fear of—I know not what—which might hap to her, growing greater at each tick of the clock.

Don Pedro laid his damp cloth again on

Digitized by Google

my forehead. "Have a care, señor. Too much excitement is harmful. I will help you gain the señorita."

"You!" I groaned. "You can't even leave my side. You are my prisoner. What can *you* do?"

Ere he could answer, we heard noises in the street, and the tread of men ascending the stairs. Don Pedro withdrew to a dark corner and I bolstered myself to a higher position. Then the smell of a torch filled my nostrils, and the figure of Shattuck, followed by several of his companions, entered the room.

He seemed surprised to see me sitting up and came forward curiously, pricking the bed-linen with his sword-point.

"Strike me dead, Siller-Shoes, an' y' know not how to die. What's the cheer?"

"I'll be out to-morrow."

Here Romeo entered and sat down upon the bedside, his face toward me and his blade across his knees. He slipped a hand into mine on the coverlet, and in the clasp of his fingers I understood he had made a new choice, one to my liking, wherefore my face flushed with pleasure and our eyes sparkled with the joy of closer comradeship.

"Well, I'm glad on' t, though I lose them purty shoes—hey, Romeo?" he snarled playfully at the lad, who made no answer. "An' not only that, but I lose—where be that Spanish vermin? So there y' are! Come out an' show y' yellow face. Hath found who he is, Siller-Shoes?" he asked, so eagerly that my surmise of his intention seemed well founded.

"Nay, it matters not, save that he's a prisoner of rank," I answered.

"I know he is your prisoner, matey, I knows it well. But I ha' reason for my question. Wilt ask him, matey?"

"Certes. Spaniard, what is your name?"

THE Don walked forward, looking at me uncertainly, and for a moment it seemed he would be foolhardy and give a fatal answer. But his good sense came to the rescue.

"My name is Gomez, Alvah Gomez of Teneriffe, señor, as hath been said before."

"Liar!" roared Shattuck, shaking his fist in the Don's face. "What I want is the truth. Out with it, else y' soul sleeps in Hades this night. Out with it, dog, I say!"

"Let be, Shattuck. He's mine." I said in haste, as the buccaneer's fingers were closing about my prisoner's throat.

"Aye, that's true eno'. But I'll have his name this night, your prisoner or no."

"Then talk to me. Romeo, take the Spaniard to yonder chamber. Shattuck! Let be. God's mercy, an I were well I'd talk to you in different fashion."

The buccaneer had caught the prisoner's arm as he made a movement to do my bidding, and Romeo slipped the sword from his lap so that the point rested on the floor, its hilt caught in his fingers ready for use. But the brave lad did not need it. Shattuck dropped his grasp and turned to me in amazement.

"Y' wish to quarrel with *me* because o' *him?*" he queried, as the Don slipped from sight. "Y' be right o' mind, Siller-Shoes?"

"Is it fair to take such advantage of a sick man?"

"Sick or well, 'twould make no difference." He turned with a laugh to his comrades who were enjoying the scene.

"He's my prisoner and I mean to have his ransom," I said curtly. "The man's name matters not, and, as there are several thousand Spaniards, go elsewhere for your amusement."

"He hath a look linking him to my little Fox at Jamaica."

"What has that to do with it?"

The freebooter leered savagely. "Everything," he growled, so fiercely that even his escort stepped back.

"Can he not bear resemblance and yet be a stranger?"

"Let him give his right name."

"I do not want it."

Shattuck hesitated and, coming close to the bedside, looked down, his face set and his eyes cold and hard. "There was something dark about the escape at Chagres—a rope an' knife, and ye—which needs explanation."

"My sword will answer."

He bent down and waved a forefinger warningly, his one tooth showing yellow and strong.

"Twixt y' shoes and y' temper, y' are a devil of a man," he said. "An' strike me dead, if I don't take the one an' th' other. Soon as ye gets well, or th' sack be finished, ye an' I go to th' plain, where I'll split ye as I would a cheese. Friendship is off atween us, Marley. Come on, mates."

He turned abruptly and, followed by his

Digitized by Google

body-guard of rapscallions, left the house, while once again the film of darkness crept over me, and in the reaction I sank to sleep.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PERIL OF MARGOT

THE wound was serious, and neither next day nor the next could I leave my bed. I was moved to the casement, where, propped by cushions, I could see up the street to the Praca dos Romulares, where the pirates had their headquarters, and from which the cannon held guardianship of the principal avenues.

In the opposite direction, over the housetops, hung a black curtain of smoke, marking the fire. At Morgan's orders a large number of cedar houses 'twixt us and the flames were blown up, and the blaze, having nothing to feed upon, crept southward among the slave-marts and wharves.

The city was turbulent, fighting in the streets of common occurrence, and pillage and sack continued unceasingly. One afternoon several captives escaped the torture, and headed down our street from the square, but were overtaken and killed, save a richly robed priest, Archbishop Perez in fact, who ran as if endowed with the wings of his religion.

Abreast my window he became spent, and, wrapping his gown about him, turned to face his pursuers, holding aloft a crucifix of gold and breathing the wrath of Heaven in a torrent of speech. The flash of a cutlass and he was down.

So little did these human fiends care for the anger of the Almighty that the one emerging victorious from the scramble for the crucifix gave a scream of delight and, holding it aloft, in imitation of the unfortunate priest, gamboled back toward the square, his brothers following.

'Twould be hard to tell who was more kind to me, the Spaniard or my faithful comrade, for they vied with each other in the service, and, owing to their vigilance, none gained admittance save a messenger from Morgan, desiring me to wait on him instant I was able.

The Don opened his heart to me, relating much of Spain and his past life, wherein he had spent many years in his King's service, fighting infidels and quelling civic revolts. Because of the fallen fortunes of his house, he joined his brother in the Indies, settled in Panama, and became associated with Don Juan Alvarez in a Peruvian mine. From a bleak prospect, it turned out successful, and both became rich. Don Pedro at once despatched a letter to Spain containing the joyful news of his prosperity, and bidding his wife and son take passage, when next the plate fleet sailed from Cadiz.

But, alas! His advice was disregarded and, through eagerness to rejoin him, they sailed earlier upon a small vessel, which was later captured by Shattuck. The Señora de Luna was killed and Don Pedro's son borne in captivity to Jamaica, there to write the direful news and spin new strands to the web of Shattuck's vengeance.

Meanwhile, Don Pedro had divers polite differences with Don Juan, who was a cold, unbending, and mercenary man, which resulted in dissolution of their alliance. Don Pedro rejoined his brother at Chagres, and there the grievous news reached him.

The question of ransom was still hanging fire when Dudley's daughter appeared, late at night and unaccompanied save by three negroes, who put to sea instant she had landed.

His heart had warmed to her, not only because of her reassuring news as to his son, but because of her winsomeness. Despite Don Juan's hostility to all things English, he sent her to his lady, and the Señora Alvarez had taken to her instantly. Don Juan refused to have much speech with her, and set Archbishop Perez to convert her to the Catholic faith, which, but for the señora, would have been accomplished by the terrible Inquisition.

As for me, I told him of my duel, my brother, my sudden flight, my quest and all which had happed therein.

Many were the schemes we laid to outwit Morgan and escape from Panama, all of which were for naught, for, according to Romeo, none were allowed within the sumptuously furnished prison of Señora Alvarez and the maid. Moreover it was surrounded by a guard and looked upon the Praca dos Romulares.

Morgan spent his evenings examining the prisoners, setting their ransoms, supervising the methodical sack of the city and drinking heavily of Spanish wines. In the

Digitized by Google

afternoon he never failed to send a messenger to the great house across the way, who would halloo to a Nubian slave at one of the casements and, upon receiving a negative nod of the head, would return to headquarters and report "no change."

This show was more or less amusing to the buccaneers, and, although wary of their expressions in its regard, yet many were the rude jests pertaining to "the Captain's love-bird whom he can not tame."

And so time passed by; precious hours of idleness wherein, despite the Don's encouragement and Romeo's reassuring reports, I grew mentally more distrait. Such procedure on Morgan's part of sweet words and gentle coercion could not long continue. He would tire of his vain efforts to please; the maid was wholly at his mercy—I shuddered at the thought.

Thus it happed one afternoon, when the heat had been tempered by a cool south wind, and the sun was showering fanciful pictures of color upon the smoke clouds, that Romeo burst into the room, flung his cap in a corner and gripped my hand.

We looked at each other without speaking while Don Pedro joined us, and both the Don and myself knew something to be dreaded had taken place.

Finally, I found my voice.

"Well, lad, what's happed? Where is she?"

"I WAS in the square as usual this afternoon," he replied, "and at three the messenger stood 'neath the window and was sent away. I delayed departure, thinking such action best, and played at 'sevens.' While at it, Morgan entered our group, asked of me how you were doing, and took Red Dick aside. We formed to a company, a score of us, and then the doors of the big house opened and the women came forth. I knew Dudley's daughter, e'en though closely veiled. We marched across the square to Morgan's headquarters and with the rest I entered the big chamber. Upon the table was a bag of gold, sent by the Spanish lady's husband from Peru."

"They are free!" I exclaimed eagerly.

"Nay—the lady is free and already on her way over the mountains, but the maid lies in a dungeon, within a stone's throw of us, bereft of all comfort, e'en of daylight, and with naught to eat save bread and water."

"He hath not harmed her?" I asked rising.

"Nay, he is but trying another way."

"Within a stone's throw," broke in Don Pedro. "I know of no dungeons hereabout."

"But 'tis so. I was of the escort. True, it doth not look the part, rather that of a church, for over the entrance is a framework where a cross of gold hath been, on each side of which are carvings of the Holy One. But within are two flights of stairs, leading into the bowels of the earth, where are cells, dark and dismal. And that is not all. I opened her cell, and, as she passed within, exclaimed she had dropped a jewel. She was as surprised as the others, and at last had recognized me, for her face brightened. Torches were brought and the flooring examined. Then one asked regarding it, and I said 'twas a beaten ring with a stone of crimson. They laughed at me, and so we went away, but she knew, Silver-Shoes, for her eyes were moist and 'twas tears of joy."

"Good lad," I exclaimed, pausing in my pacing and giving him such a look of admiration his cheeks flushed.

"This prison—" said Don Pedro. "Doth it have paintings of our Holy Mother upon the panels?"

"Aye."

"And is there a tracery of Judas upon the threshold?"

"There was a carving of a man's head, but of whom I know not."

Don Pedro turned to me.

"'Tis the dwelling of Archbishop Perez."

I recommenced pacing, for Morgan had shown his patience was nearing an end and would ill brook further delay. I must get her while there yet be time.

"What is her guard?" I asked.

"One man, Red Dick, who methinks doth not fancy the task."

"One? Morgan grows confident!"

"Aye, but she is secure behind bars, beyond which Red sits at a table, and by aid of tallow must amuse himself with cards till he falls asleep, for she will not grant him a word. And Morgan hath the cell key in his pocket. Oh, she is safe enough."

"I'm not so sure of that. What sort of key hath he?"

Both the Don and Romeo looked at me, for there was a new note in my voice, a note of eagerness which could not have been

Digitized by Google

concealed an I so wished—for in the instant I had formed a new plan of escape.

"Key?" repeated the latter. "Why, the usual sort, something akin to the one yonder."

He pointed to a small, empty chest.

I went to it, seized the iron ring, and dropped the key in my pocket.

"Now, lad, go you to Morgan and say I shall wait on him this night at eight of the clock. Find out if such is his pleasure, and pray God it may be."

He snatched his cap without a word and disappeared.

Don Pedro caught my arm, attempting to coax me toward the bed, but I shook him off.

"What is your intention, señor?" he asked, as I commenced pacing again.

"The gates are locked and the guard set at sundown," I replied. "You have spoken of a secret way from the city, in which we shall need your guidance, for we leave Panama this night—and the maid goes with us!"

"This night! You are scarce able to stand!"

"Able to stand! Me! I have walked a league about this wretched room already. And now I must find a jacket, a wondrous jacket, with large and spacious pockets, and of a color and texture to dazzle one's eyes. Know you of any such?"

"There are several in yonder room. This is a house of quality, the dwelling of our Peruvian minister."

"Bring them hither."

He reappeared some moments later, his arms full of silks and velvets, from which I seized upon one instantly—a gorgeous affair of green and yellow silk netted with fanciful embroidery, the sleeves slashed and laced, the pockets deep, spacious and monogrammed.

"The very thing!" I said, turning it on all sides. "I wonder will it fit?"

"What do you propose, señor?"

"At eight I go to Morgan. Thence, Romeo will take me to this House of Dungeons. We shall gain entrance—never fear—and the key to her cell will be with me. When we come forth with the maid, you must be nigh. Is there a rear exit?"

"Aye."

"Good! Be there at the hour, and wait in shadow."

Then we fell silent, while I burnished a neglected sword, sharpened my dagger and put myself in condition of dress suitable for the street. For the moment, mind triumphed over matter, but reaction set in and I tumbled upon the bed, dizzy and faint, while Don Pedro ministered unto me with his cloth and drugs.

When Romeo had returned, darkness had closed down, the candles were burning and I was asleep, but his noisy entrance awoke me.

"What news?" I asked, rising and buckling on a sword with unsteady fingers.

"He is mellow from liquor, but will see ye, e'en though of dangerous temper, and wished to be let alone. Perhaps 'twould be wise to wait till the morrow."

"Wait? Not I. What's the clock?"

"The bell hath just struck eight."

I jammed a velvet hat, which had been found among the clothes, upon my head, seized the jacket, folded it carefully and started for the door.

Romeo looked questioningly at the Don, who nodded and then followed me down the stairway and into the street, where a few minutes' walk brought us to the large square.

CHAPTER XXIII

SILLER-SHOES A-TAILORING

AS I walked through the streets I saw that the dwellings had been thoroughly ransacked. Their doors for the greater part were torn away, and the interiors cluttered with a medley of silks and satins, tossed in careless confusion during the eager search for gold. Such of the yellow as was exposed came from the cisterns and wells in the rear, where it had found hasty concealment, but in amount 'twas wofully small.

This caused a gloom that was self-evident upon the many repulsive and villainous faces about the numerous bonfires, for the Praca was ablaze with light. Some were singing, some were dicing and some were fast asleep. Many recognized and gave me greeting as we picked our way among them, but their faces bespoke a curiosity not understood until Lollie Hatton halted us and shook my hand.

"Knocked to the skivit, boiled in bed and out again ready to serve others as y' would

Digitized by Google

be served y'self. Ho! ho! lad. I wish ye well."

"What mean you?"

He bent forward. "Hast seen Shattuck?"

"Nay; I have but just come hence."

"He nurses a sore which we understand will be healed upon the plain, and we'll all be there to see, lad, every one o' us, for 'twill be a fight worthy o' my grandsire. When think ye 'twill take place?"

"A few days hence, when my legs shall match my will."

"I don't blame ye, Siller-Shoes. My father would ha' done the same. An' I will see ye get fair play, although with Dick Shattuck 'tis not necessary, save I would ha' ye know I'd be friend to ye both. 'Twas your prisoner. Y' had the right."

"Thanks," I answered, starting forward, at which the smile faded from his face and he scowled. "I have an appointment with Morgan," I added in explanation, "and am past due."

"With him, to-night! Oh ho! He hath had a trying day an' is so fuddled he can not tell pieces of eight from sweetmeats. Y' knew he was smushed upon a captive wench?"

"Aye, Romeo told me. I'll speak with you later, Lollie. Farewell."

The buccaneer shrugged his shoulders and turned away, while we walked on hastily toward the Governor's house.

Several pirates grouped about the entrance barred progress. A Dutch captain named Black Charles was called. He had received orders to admit us, for we were taken into a large hall, where two of our number were at cards about a table, more drunk than sober. At least they swayed in their play perilously near the wondrous candlestick of gold placed between them.

"He is in his cups, Siller-Shoes, so have a care," warned Black Charles. "If he throws things or hits ye, do not strike back, else 'tis good night to ye. If he draws, slip to the back room an' bar the door. Remember now, I warned ye."

With that he drew aside a large curtain and pushed us beyond.

We were in a room of state, of immense size and great confusion. The walls were covered with paintings and tapestries of value. Two massive jettings of candlelight, dazzling in number of pin-points glittering amid the gold network, hung down from the ceiling and filled the room with a glare of brightness. Over in one corner, upon a raised platform where had formerly been the Governor's chair, were piled a medley of gold and silver trinkets, jewels and precious stones, rare velvets and silks. The rich rugs were stained with the tread of muddy feet and littered with broken bottles, crockery and wearing apparel, the last having been torn from the prisoners during their examination.

At the farther end of the room, his head pillowed in his arms upon a long table cluttered with bottles, knives, gold pieces and valuables of gold and silver, sat Morgan, who raised his head as we entered and seized a pistol with a low growl.

"Did I not say I was to be left——" He broke off, dropped his weapon, which struck a bottle, both going to the floor with a crash of glass, and held out his arms as if he would embrace me.

"By my star—Silver-Heels! Welcome, lad. Draw up, close to my side."

We dragged chairs toward him and sat down, not until he had wrung my hand, however, so long and so wantonly that my brain reeled and the room turned black.

"And how d' ye feel, brave lad?" he continued, pushing bottles and tankards toward us, and cracking the neck of another upon the table's edge. "And have ye seen Shattuck?"

"I left my bed scarce a half hour past and came direct to you, Captain," I answered, filling a massive cup of gold with rare, sweet wine.

"Which speaks well," grunted Morgan, placing the broken bottle to his lips. "Would that a few of the rest showed a like faith in their leader. But they are a mixed lot: Dutch, French, English. And mixed drinks create trouble!"

Again he placed the bottle to his lips.

"They are disgruntled, for we find not the treasures we hoped. I am to blame! *Am* I? Did not the fools get maudlin during their chase of the *Santa Maria* and lose her because of their condition? Yet I am to blame! Bah! And to think of the promise I have made our——"

He paused, leering at Romeo. "What do ye here?" he asked abruptly.

"I belong to Silver-Shoes, my Captain," quoth the lad.

"Begone," said Morgan tartly.

Digitized by Google

Romeo arose, wavering uncertainly, and started across the room.

"Wait for me beyond the curtains," I called after him as he disappeared.

"TO RESUME," continued Morgan. "Ye know of the sum I promised our King. That, of itself, takes all we have gathered. And it shall be paid, but there remains naught for us in the doing. I have sent parties of horse into the hills daily to gather Spaniards. There are two thousand herded in the Cathedral awaiting ransom, yet were there twice ten thousand 'twould not be enough. Where to gain more gold, I know not, an' yet I fear to leave, because of mutiny. So I shall stay till they tire—the fools! Ye like not Spanish vintage?"

"Aye, Captain," I said, draining my tankard.

He pushed his chair back and staggered to the casement, throwing aside the lattice and pointing out into the night.

"Look over the housetops," he said. "See that glare? 'Tis a foe we can not subdue. The Genoese slave-mart, two churches, a monastery and several thousand dwellings have been devoured."

He closed the lattice and lurched again into his seat. "Some say I set it, wherein they are not only fools but liars. 'Sdeath! I did not travel ten days through a wilderness of starvation and hardship to fire a city ere I sacked it!"

He mumbled several sentences under his breath, looking up at the blaze of candles and squinting. Then he fell to drinking and, when satiated, turned his eyes upon me.

"Hath your prisoner gained his ransom?"

"'Tis expected daily," I said, for which God forgive me the lie.

"Why did ye quarrel with Dick?"

"I liked not his treatment, neither of my prisoner nor myself."

"Um! um!" He drummed absently upon the table. "That is why I would see ye. I would prevent the fight. Oh, I know," he continued, wagging his head as I started to protest, "y' are overconfident. We all are at times. But y' have not the lucky star like myself. I would do ye favor, for y' service upon the plain. When can ye start for Chagres?"

My face fell, at which he laughed loudly.

"Y' start this night, Silver-Heels, with twenty men. Flaxen Hair Gilmour hath been killed by falling from the sea-wall, and ye will have charge. Stock the *Merry Charles* with provender and several of the big guns and keep watch for me, night and day, for when I come, methinks, I shall need the ship at once. In doing this I keep ye apart from Dick, and prevent a fight which would lose ye your head. That is the gratitude of Captain Morgan. Return in an hour and all will be ready."

He held out his hand, signifying the interview was over, and I arose slowly.

"I will leave Panama this night," I replied, my spirits sinking with a fear I might not gain the coveted key after all. I unrolled my parcel and held it up before him, so placed the light would glint upon the maze of gold and silver lace.

"I brought this as a present, Captain."

"'Tis fair, but overweighted in color." As he spoke, my heart nigh stopped beating. "Place it on the table."

"Try it on," I replied quickly. "I would see the fit."

He shrugged his shoulders indifferently and arose. I stepped forward and took his jacket, then held the new one at his back. Because of his condition it was difficult to slip the garment on. Finally, I stepped away and surveyed him carefully.

"'Tis a perfect fit," I exclaimed.

"Zooks, y' should have been a cutter of cloth in your pleasure. Right-o! A perfect *fit!* Take it off."

This I hastened to do, replacing his own, during which his temper became ruffled and he fell to cursing.

"Begone, Silver-Heels, and throw the thing into yonder corner. I want gold, not cloth. We were to share alike on your Spaniard?"

"Aye," I answered lightly, stepping toward the door and laying my gift among many others far better.

"See to it ye are here within the hour," he cried, and then I passed beyond the curtains.

Romeo was dicing with the two in the hall, one of whom had his hair burnt through carelessness and presented a grotesque appearance. The lad looked up quickly.

One glance was enough and his face beamed, for he saw joy in mine own, and knew that thus far we had been successful.

Then, amid the remonstrances of his comrades, we slipped to the door and beyond into the night air.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HOUSE OF DUNGEONS

"NOW to the House of Dungeons," I whispered, as we made our way betwixt the groups of merry makers among the pimento-trees.

Little was said to us, several gave greeting, but none seemed overfriendly, and Lollie had disappeared, so that we emerged from the fires and idlers without interruption.

"What have ye done?" asked Romeo as we hurried along.

"Outwitted him thus far, methinks. Nor do I think he will make discovery till the new key fails to fit, for, glory be, they are both the same. I brought him a jacket, which he tried on, to please me, but would not wear. During the moment his coat was in my grasp, a change of keys took place, and the one we desire lies here!"

I pressed my hand to my side. "Now to gain entrance to this jail, which you must do, as Red Dick is more of your kidney than my own."

"How dared ye!" was the mumbled answer. "Suppose he finds out. What then?"

"Take courage, lad. The game is worth the play, and together we will prove too much for them."

"I know, I know," he replied jerkingly. "But we will be the first to brave the Brotherhood's anger and survive! Here is the place."

He rapped with his dagger upon a door, the half-light from bonfires flashing faintly in reflection upon its panels and revealing a weird arrangement of saints and martyrs painted and carved thereon. For a moment we listened, then he rapped again.

"Silver-Shoes," he whispered, suddenly bending down and peering across the street. "See any one in yonder doorway?"

A man was standing silently by the wall, a dark, powerful figure, one thin thread of light from his waist to the ground showing steel. His was the attitude of a silent avenger, waiting, watchful and ready.

"Who is he?" I muttered, feeling for my weapon.

Romeo caught my arm.

"Nay, don't draw. He hath not made up his mind, but the play is well-nigh over for us. Farewell to Port Royal, my Betty and pieces of eight. 'Tis Shattuck."

Again I looked, and this time the shadowy form took outline, its square shoulders, bowed legs and massive bulk coming out in strong relief.

"I mind me as we came through the square," continued the lad, his teeth chattering. "He spoke to ye, but y' heard him not. I wonder can Red hear us?" He pounded again vigorously. "Our only hope is to get within."

There was a scraping beyond the door, a panel slid back and a voice, easily recognized by its harsh rasp, inquired what was wanted. Romeo plucked up his fallen courage and made a waggish answer, for there came a chuckle of delight, the jingle and fall of chains, and shortly the door opened, flooding us with light.

"And Siller-Shoes will play too," said Red Dick eagerly.

Ere I could answer and follow Romeo, who had stepped over the threshold, I felt a hand I knew well heavy upon my shoulder.

"Either y' go to bed, m' bold cock, or by torchlight to the plain," he said threateningly, as he shook me. "Red never games with ye, and that y' may lay to. What y' doing here?"

I reeled about, swaying from side to side, lurching toward him and then away, muttering nonsense and acting a strange part as best I could. He shook me several times, finally taking his hand from my jacket and uttering a curse of genuine surprise.

"Strike me dead, y' be foxed, that's what y' be—foxed. I thought as how ye was up to deviltry, but I finds ye up to y' neck in Spanish grape. Ho! ho! my dandy from London town!"

He laughed heartily and slipped the long sword back in his belt.

Now was the chance. While his head was bent, I swung my fist upon the point of his jaw, so hard I feared for a moment I had crushed my hand, and giving that gruesome molar, sole relic of his earlier days, the sharpest pang it had ever felt.

He toppled backward with a yell as I dashed within and slammed the door, clapping several bars in place and lacing the chains in style to do greatest service.

Then came the thud of a heavy body against it, then again and again, but the wood was stout and well seasoned.

Digitized by Google

For the present, Shattuck could not get within.

Suddenly remembering Romeo and Red Dick, who for the moment had gone from mind, I dropped a chain and turned about.

Romeo was standing several paces away beneath the bracket of candles, his eyes fastened upon the door and his lips trembling. Half the space twixt us lay Red Dick, face downward, his arm stretched before him amd his small sword just beyond reach. A dagger hilt protruded from his back.

I looked and frowned.

"You should have wounded rather than killed. 'Tis wanton, cowardly!"

The lad for a moment gave no answer. His mind was upon the door and he was listening in terror to the yells for help from the infuriated man without. Then he braced his shoulders, threw up his head, took down one of the candles from its socket and started for the stairs.

"God forgive me! I did not mean it. My hand must have slipped when I saw him draw and start for ye. Make haste, Silver-Shoes. Every pirate in the square will be here directly. Zooks! We are as good as dead already. If ye but knew them as I do!"

A heavier crash upon the door made him turn and descend a broad flight of stairs, while I followed, with thoughts more of what was before than the sounds of death behind.

DOWN two flights we went, into a foulness and closeness so stifling 'twere a wonder the flame could burn. A sudden turn brought us to a small room, in the center of which was a rough table, a chair, some flagons of wine and a greasy pack of Spanish cards. The floor was soggy, evidently below sea-level, and one felt the presence of unseen things best left undescribed. The walls were bounded by bars opening into cells beyond, eight in all, dark and foreboding. My first thought was to marvel at the cruel ingenuity of any one who could build such living death.

Romeo was confused, and, for the moment, could not tell which was the cell. He advanced to the table and held the light above his head, but I saw a tiny hand clasping one of the bars and a small face peering out at us, the eyes bright and glistening.

I knew without being told that this was the maid I had come to find.

I ran to the grating and fitted the key. In vain I tried to turn the bolt, wrenching this way and that, until I reeled from exhaustion and the black dread of failure swept over me.

Then a voice said, "Press down as you turn. 'Tis the way with Spanish locks."

A moment later the heavy grating swung apart, and a small figure advanced into the light toward Romeo, while behind her I heard the foul things scampering to and fro in the darkness.

She was clad in rough homespun, falling loosely about her and caught by a cord wove around her waist. Her hair was in disorder, falling over her shoulders and dropping nigh to the floor.

I saw Romeo smile wanly and extend his hand. As the maid sought to grasp it, she reeled, and would have fallen, had I not caught her. Then she lay back against me, a dead weight, with her eyes closed, her arms limp and her body lifeless.

"I knew it," I grunted, but with the satisfaction of possession nevertheless. "Anything from mice to murder, and *pouf!*—'tis a spell of the vapors. I' faith! What a din they make above!"

We could hear the pounding and screaming, a bedlam of voices, portending anger and rage and horrible torture once the door gave way. And I had one experience with Spanish doors which was more than enough, so, despite my weakness, I picked the maid up bodily and started for the stairs.

As we approached the upper hall, the screams and battering grew deafening, and in company with the silent figure nigh us, who could hear nothing, we perceived the barrier already showing signs of weakness and splinters from the jamb dropping away.

"There is an exit to the rear," I cried. "Lead on. We'll find it."

He turned and passed down the long hall, but I lingered for a moment 'neath the light and, despite the danger without and its ominous noise, half smiled at thought of my burden. A smile of satisfaction, of self-pride, an you will, of achievement of the end for which I had come. A smile which a soldier grants when he has saved an army and knows it. Alas, we were not yet in London town and, haply, ignorance of our failure prevented the knowledge of

Digitized by Google

hardship yet to come, worse than any we had encountered, and with an even nearer approach to death than at this moment, with a treacherous door gradually giving way.

I looked down into her face framed upon my shoulder: the smooth white flesh bordered by a mass of dark, silken tresses; the Madonna shape of the chin and nose; the delicate curve of the lips, now thin and bloodless; the lashes closing eyes that had conquered my brother's heart. I paused. Yea, verily, he had not done badly.

But all the same I felt a thrill of fear, of wonder, for the face I had just seen was that oft pictured in my dreams, of the one woman above the frills and frippery of a spendthrift and vicious age and worthy of a man's honest devotion, which I had seen again in my vision at Spanish Town, and as I followed Romeo along the hall these words, which he claimed to have uttered: "Fear not, Apollo; all will yet be well," rang in my ears.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ANCIENT TUNNEL

THE hall was of such length that upon reaching the end the bracket of light seemed small and the figure upon the floor scarce discernible, but the cries from without and the hacking upon the door grew fiercer and nearer.

'Twould not be long ere the wood gave way. E'en now 'twas faltering, and Romeo hurriedly threw down the bars. Finally, he extinguished the candle, drew a wicket aside for observation, and then, with sword drawn, slipped out into the night. A man detached himself from the obscurity and came to our side.

"Heaven be praised," he said devoutly, drawing close and passing his hand softly over the features he could not see. "They scream so loud I feared you had been caught. We must make haste. Can you carry her, señor?"

"Aye, with ease," I replied dryly, making a grimace.

"Then this is the way." He walked swiftly across the street, at right angles. I followed close with my burden, and Romeo guarded the rear.

We passed in and out of numerous alleys, turning this way and that till I had lost all idea of where we were. The angry cries of the pirates soon died away in distance, but any moment I expected to hear the clatter of horses' hoofs.

I doubted not our escape had been discovered and pursuit commenced. From my knowledge of Shattuck, the city would be thoroughly searched.

This thought lent strength to my steps, and we traveled fast yet quietly. The quarter we were in was deserted, save of beggars by day and dogs after nightfall. Several of the latter ran at our heels, barking and snapping.

Now, as I feared, came the cry of men and the clatter of hoofs and weapons. As we passed at the head of a street, we saw a mob of pirates, well lighted by torches, almost within stone's throw, dash hastily by at right angles upon an avenue.

Several detached themselves from the main body and came riding slowly toward us, casting their torches in all dark corners.

"We are lost," murmured Romeo, looking about anxiously, and fearing to move lest the dogs begin to bark.

"Nay," I whispered, ripping the shutters of a window with my dagger. "In with you," suiting the word by climbing over the sill.

When the yellow light of our pursuers filtered through the lattice, we were safely within, silent as the stars. The senseless maid lay upon the floor in a corner, and Romeo, the Spaniard and myself were ready for them.

There were but four in all, laughing and jesting as if they had naught on their minds but matted locks. I heard one of them say in passing, that in case they came up with us, all four had best attack "Siller-Shoes."

Then their voices, hoof-beats and lights died away, and we were left in darkness and silence.

I threw open the shutter and jumped out. The maid was carefully placed in my arms, and soon we were on our way, Romeo most concerned, for his teeth chattered with fear.

"Zounds, Silver-Shoes," he whispered. "What if they return!"

"We must take that chance," I replied. "You would not have us remain in yonder darkness? At dawn, all dwellings will be searched. Where to now, Spaniard?"

The Don set so swift a pace 'twas hard

Digitized by Google

labor, weighted by my burden and a weakness which was creeping over me, to keep in step, and several stumbles put me in such a temper for fear of falling that I muttered many unkind things, whereat Romeo, despite his fears, grunted at the company he kept, and his lecture restored good humor.

So, with swords drawn, now running, now walking, but not again meeting with danger, we came at last to one of the smaller of the King's stables, just within the walls, which, because of its isolation, had escaped the fire.

Into this Don Pedro led the way, and by candle-light, which he half concealed under his broad hat, ran to the farther stall, now empty. Seizing a huge ring he pulled sideways. A portion of the wall slowly opened, the candle revealing a narrow passage, crossed and recrossed with spider-webs and giving evidence of long disuse.

Don Pedro entered with his light, I following, and Romeo last, the lad losing some minutes by his difficulty in closing the entrance,

How long we walked within I know not. We encountered divers living things, some with wings, which flew from the darkness into the candle, snuffing it many times and causing repeated delay. For a goodly distance we waded in water to our knees, and always I had the fear of falling, for the ground was most uneven and my strength was failing.

At last the Spaniard extinguished the candle, whereat we saw stars ahead, and a few moments later emerged from the stifling hole into the cool night air.

WE WERE upon a hillside, amidst a quarry of rocks, huge boulders, whose grim silence was a joyous welcome to release and freedom. A warm wind swept up the slope, playing a hide-and-seek with the maid's ringlets upon my shoulder, and down below in the darkness we heard it gamboling amongst the trees. Behind us rose our hill blending into blackness. Before us stretched open savanna, which, although not seen, was felt.

"Safe!" I exclaimed, astonished. "You have done well, Spaniard. Where is the city? I am turned quite about."

"Yonder." He pointed upward toward the hilltop. "A gunshot away."

"'Tis not far enough." I looked at the heavens twinkling with lights. "We have five or more hours yet of darkness. Can we get mounts?"

The Spaniard hesitated. "There lies a village a league distant where I am well known. 'Tis the only chance."

"We will go there," I said, giving vent to an inward groan, for my legs and head were aching, and the maid showed no signs of consciousness.

"Lead on," I said cheerily, wishing the devil would for once lend me a pair of wings.

Romeo and I walked for the most part in silence, the lad lending support when crossing brooks or marsh-land.

Later, the moon disappeared, and shortly after we topped another rise and commenced a blessed descent amidst a score of burned dwellings. Although we could not see, the smell of burnt wood foretold the the fire had been recent.

Don Pedro paused.

"Alas!" he said. "Here is the village. What shall we do?"

"Is there no other place where we may get mounts?"

"None," he answered sadly. "I had many friends here. 'Tis a grievous thing to find."

"And much worse to know we are but a league from the city and I can go little farther. Daybreak will soon be here. Know you of a spot wherein we may hide?"

"A cave—but 'tis open to all who pass."

"Nathless, for want of better, 'twill have to do. Which way?"

Again we proceeded, and now I was forced to release the maid to Romeo, and bend what small energy remained toward keeping myself from falling. So I followed as far as possible in the rear lest they find me out, stumbling and reeling, and dizzily wondering how long 'twould be ere a pair of wretched legs gave way.

The cave was a large one, from the mouth of which we could see the dark outline of much savanna, but, as the Spaniard had said, it was prominently exposed. Within, however, were loose boulders behind which we could hide, so that any one in passing could not see us.

I tottered to a mess of leaves, well-nigh blind from fatigue and, regardless of the others, fell upon it and knew no more.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXVI

THE METTLE OF THE LITTLE MAID

SO DEEP was my slumber that, when I opened my eyes to a faint light 'midst the Stygian gloom, 'twas as if I had but closed them a moment before. But a thin shaft of fading sunlight upon the arched roof high overhead, a gnawing of hunger and a few intakes of heat-laden air, foretold my rest had been lengthy and a new day was near its close.

A hasty glance showed I was alone, and somewhat excitedly I half started to arise. Then I perceived her with Romeo and Don Pedro at the opening, intent upon the valley below. As I lay back, munching a morsel of dried meat, and in great contentment despite our known danger, Romeo came toward me.

"Tis most sundown, laggard," he said cheerfully. "How feels the brave Silver-Shoes?"

"My head rocks, but 'twill wear away. You should have wakened me, lad, hours ago."

"Nay, there was no need, and Don Pedro seemed most anxious to give ye long rest. For the past hour we have been watching a party of horse in the valley, but they are gone. The maid hath asked much concerning ye, and seems overgrateful, when the Spaniard certes hath as much claim to her gratitude. I have said but little, as I would give ye reputation and not discredit."

I looked at him severely.

"This is no time for banter, Romeo. Send the Spaniard hither."

"At your service, señor," was the reply, close at hand; and as I sat up I perceived him standing a few paces away, with the maid, who was watching me intently.

"I am sorry we can not get mounts," I said, after a pause, "for the way is long and your feet are tender. But, once beyond the mountains, we can travel slow and in security. You are ready to start?"

"*Si, señor,* this night, and alas, we can not go to Peru!"

"Can not go to Peru!" I exclaimed. "After all our planning! Why?"

"Don Juan sent only enough ransom for the señora."

"Methinks we needed none for the maid."

"*Si,* yet the señora had urgently requested that such be sent. This shows unwillingness on his part to accept the señorita, much less to assist her further. As for you or your comrade—'tis out of question."

"This Don Juan—is he the *only* man in Peru?" I asked scornfully.

The Spaniard nodded.

"He is the only one powerful enough at present, when Peru is so very bitter against your country, to grant us free passage to Spain."

I bit my lips in vexation.

"You were so sure of him," I said sadly, "that I thought our troubles ended, once away from Panama. And now, methinks, they have but just begun."

"Don Juan is a good man albeit hard and close," replied Don Pedro quickly. "His hatred of all things English is natural, in that these pirates have destroyed many of his possessions on the Main. But he is just, and in some ways tender at heart, and I thought——"

"Aye—you thought," I echoed.

"I could not see how, knowing the señorita, he would not wish to do her service. Instead, I find his usage of her not alone severe, but cruel, and to go to him would mean as sad a death as to return to Panama. It hath been my error. I am very sorry."

"You have friends on the Main, godfather," broke in the maid, "for so you told me. Why not go to them?"

"*Si,* my child. I would need no friends there. But how can we travel? Surely you would not tramp the hills and swamps, amid hostile Indians, pirates, beasts and forest monsters, and the pestilence lurking everywhere?"

"God forbid," assented Romeo fervently.

"That is what I would do," she answered.

"'Tis not to be thought of," replied the Don. "We dare not travel by the river—I have only a compass, and the way is long and the danger too great. We should die of starvation."

"Better so than Panama and torture," she said.

"Are there no friendly tribes of Indians beyond the mountains with whom we could tarry until the freebooters be gone?" queried Romeo.

The Don hesitated. "I have heard of several to the south, along the banks of a

Digitized by Google

mighty river where there is gold and food a-plenty. Yet no man I have met hath ever seen them."

I listened no longer, but jumped to my feet, with shining eyes, and advanced to the maid with arms outstretched.

"MY BROTHER'S promised wife," I said proudly, looking down and holding her small hands in mine own, "fears neither hostile Indians, pirates, beasts and forest monsters, nor the pestilence. You should give them shame. Sir George is fortunate."

I dropped her hands and turned.

"Many men have sought just such a hidden El Dorado as you suggest. None ever met with success. Fear dims your eyes and clouds reason, but it makes milady's vision clearer and her wisdom greater. Come to earth, Don Pedro and Romeo, and chase facts, not phantoms. We start for the Main this night."

Romeo gazed at me in amazement for a moment, then a droll look spread over his face, and he half smiled. He, too, advanced upon the maid and took her hands.

"I have watched the fishers with their nets for hours, m' lady," he said mockingly, "and have seen them sweep hundreds in a single cast, but never have I seen so short and great a catch."

I paid him scant attention, for Romeo I knew of old. But Don Pedro was of different metal. So a silence.

"You are in earnest, señor?"

"Aye, Don Pedro. 'Tis the only way."

For some minutes he made no answer, turning the plan over in his mind, with eyes upon the maid.

"I am with you, of course," he said finally, "and hesitate only because of the señorita."

He drew a deep breath and extended his hand.

"You have pledged her, and your comrade hath pledged you both. I too would give a pledge. Success, señor."

His fingers tightened, and I felt the grip of a brave man, braver than we, in that he knew best of all the dangers and difficulty before us.

But in that instant all barriers were swept aside. We were strangers no longer; racial feelings and religious differences were gone, and we became as four together, with each for all the others, and all as one.

A short time after, while the shadows were deepening and I was peering without into a vale of woodland and rolling green, watching for the twilight and anxious to depart, the maid came nigh, standing 'neath an arched rock, where the reds and browns of sunset tinted her face.

"I have not thanked you for my rescue," she said timidly. "And I would not have you think me ungrateful."

In the posture she stood, one would need to be not only deaf to the music of her voice, but blind to the charm of her face and figure, to give any answer save that of the courtier or gallant. Though more often than not they are both one, yet I was neither. Still, I made the attempt:

"I have never met a woman more worthy of valor. Your greatness, therefore, would make the most difficult achievement a mere trifle. Thus your thanks are not merited, m' lady." I stopped, staring at her. "Why, you seem very young—scarce more than a beautiful child."

She smiled.

"Would that I could always be called such. And you—when at rest, as now, you seem good-natured and docile, of the sort to be driven by a thread of silk. Yet when your eyes flash and your shoulders stiffen, I doubt if iron rings could hold you down."

I smiled with her, a smile of pride and pleasure, for already was she near and dear—a sensible, courageous, beautiful maid; and God wot, I never could place those three upon any woman in the court of King Charles!

She pointed to my ring.

"Did he give it to you?"

"Aye."

"Did he say aught regarding it?"

"Naught save that it would prove me, the which Romeo hath done, methinks."

She looked at me with a gaze somewhat of restraint, yet frankly curious.

"Romeo could never prove you *that* way," she answered. "And if Milord George were here, neither could he. Do you not think," she added, picking her words with care, "that *he* should have come hither for me?"

"Which he would have done long since," I replied, "were't not for the cares of court."

"But if he really—really cared? Should he figure his position above my welfare?"

Digitized by Google

"'Tis for your future happiness he so guards it. I can understand now why he hath worked to such estate."

"Oh, *can* you?" she answered softly, but the note in her voice made me turn to her. "Then perhaps you can also tell how we shall return to England," quoth she.

"Don Pedro will gain us passage for Spain. Once there, I shall conduct you. Our difficulty lies in tramping over the hills, but with such courage as you have shown, I'll wager none of us grows faint-hearted."

She did not smile with me, but seemed surprised.

"I thought you could not return to England. Romeo said—at least I understood——" she paused lamely.

"'Tis true. I fought a duel and was forced to flee. But since then I have had the time, denied me in those few short hours, to think it over. My flight was cowardly, a disgrace deeper even than the duel; yet then I had rank, honor and friends to blind me and life was sweet. Now am I stripped of all three, and see things as they are. This land is strange to me, I like it not, and danger lies everywhere till you are safe in my brother's palace. To complete my quest, I shall take you there in person. It means much to catch a short glimpse of home and former friends once more——" I hesitated. "And it means the noose at Tynsboro," I added, lowering my voice and looking away.

"But I would see Milord Dudley, my father."

"I fear that can not be."

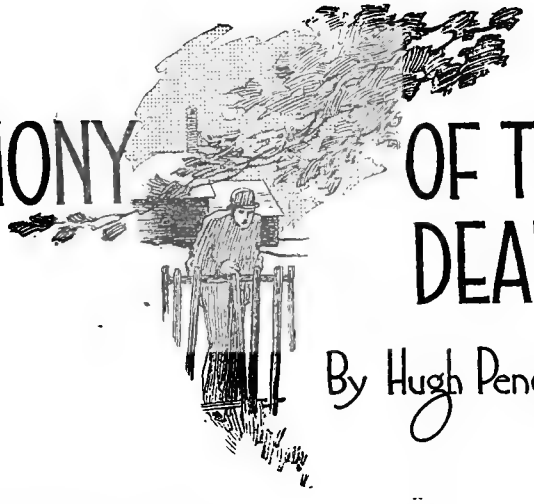
She looked at me soberly.

"They call you Silver-Shoes. I would change to 'Firebrand,' and I know better than dispute with you. So we'll not talk on't. See! the light is fast fading and the fields are covered with mist. Can we not start?"

I called to Don Pedro and Romeo, and a few minutes later we slipped cautiously away into the gloom and obscurity.

TO BE CONCLUDED

THE TESTIMONY OF THE DEAD MAN



By Hugh Pendexter

THE REV. MR. ADISON, president of the Men's Reformation League, halted undecidedly on the threshold and eyed Ezra Stackpole Butterworth, founder of the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation, questioningly. For that celebrated criminologist was displaying every symptom of impatience and annoyance.

"You told me to come," apologized Mr. Adison. "I hope I don't interrupt any train of thought."

"Be seated, pray," sharply invited Mr. Butterworth, flinging himself into a chair by the table, which was littered with newspaper clippings and typewritten memoranda. "It's my assistant, Jethuel, who disturbs me—by neither coming nor telephoning. Good heavens, to think of three days lost from my work! Even had you

Digitized by Google

been a complete stranger, rather than an old friend, I should have rejoiced when you 'phoned me yesterday. For three days I've been confined to my rooms here, trying to maintain a decent level of normality. When you explained your case yesterday, I instantly set Jethuel at work. But it's tedious, this directing affairs over the wire. As soon as I escape the doctor, I shall discharge Jethuel."

And the old lawyer frowned ominously and inwardly vowed all sorts of discipline for his eccentric assistant and right-hand man.

"I called you up the minute the crime was discovered," meekly ventured Mr. Adison. "For not only is the welfare of Jenkins Homes involved, but the very existence of our League. Since yesterday I have been trying to collate the evidence, but I'm afraid I haven't as much to offer as you might——"

"I have read the newspapers very closely," quickly broke in Mr. Butterworth, "and have already set about solving the case."

Then, after pawing over some papers, he continued: "To save time, I will state the situation as the authorities view it, and if I'm wrong, you can set me right."

As he adjusted his spectacles, preparatory to summing up the evidence in the case, the deep lines of irritation slowly faded from the corners of his firm mouth and left his face almost placid.

"Ahem," he softly prefaced, "I will now say it is a simple yet beautiful situation. To condense: Jenkins Homes, released day before yesterday from Sing Sing prison after serving a ten-year sentence, minus the time off for good behavior, is now held by the coroner on the charge of murdering Peter Kelp, a notorious police character of this city. The killing is alleged to have occurred within a few hours after Homes became a free man."

"That's correct," groaned Mr. Adison. "And it gives —to speak in the vernacular— a very black eye to our League, just when we're fighting for an appropriation to permit us to extend our work of reclaiming discharged convicts."

"Naturally," muttered Mr. Butterworth, frowning at a bunch of newspaper clippings. "But let us present the evidence in proper order. According to the coroner's case, Homes received a letter shortly before being released, in which the dead man asked him to come immediately to Hillview after his discharge. The writer, for some reason or other, courted privacy and designated a meeting-place on the outskirts of the village near an abandoned tannery. Homes went to Hillview, arriving on the last trolley-car, fifty-five minutes after midnight.

"The only resident in that part of the village having a view of the tannery observed Kelp leaning against the fence, waiting for several hours. This resident is a woman, whose husband was away on a business trip. Being nervous at the presence of a stranger, she extinguished her lights, but remained up, watching, till a late hour.

"At about one o'clock—yesterday morning— she beheld a man resembling Homes in build, as to clothes and gait, coming up the street. It was a bright, moonlight night, as we all know, and she says that when opposite her house he halted and glanced at his watch. She could observe his features, and positively identified him later. She saw him proceed to the corner, where Kelp was still leaning against the fence. She saw him halt and, after a few moments, suddenly extend his right hand. Almost immediately the man leaning against the fence seemed to crumple up, and quickly fell to the ground. Homes, she says, leaned over him, then straightened and ran away at a swift pace.

"Being alone and afraid, and there being no telephone in the house, she remained locked in her room till morning. Then she hastened to the village and told what she had seen. The coroner at once repaired to the corner and found Kelp dead, stabbed through the heart with some slender weapon. An eighth of an inch of a cigar was found between his fingers. Then James Lazell, a commercial traveler, came forward and informed that he had observed Kelp leaning against the fence and smoking at about eight o'clock. Kelp was identified by letters found on his person. No one yet has been found who saw the dead man arrive at the meeting-place.

"The coroner, it seems, had brains enough to wire at once for Kelp's antecedents, and quickly learned his name had been connected with that of Jenkins Homes when the latter was tried and convicted in this city for a robbery. At the time, public opinion held Kelp equally guilty with Homes, but he managed to prove an alibi and incidentally furnished evidence that greatly aided the prosecution in sending

Digitized by Google

Kelp to prison. The coroner at once looked up Homes, and learned he had been released from prison the day before. He also learned about the letter and the fact that Homes went to Hillview as requested.

"Within ten hours after the finding of Kelp's body Homes was arrested in this city, and charged with the crime. He insisted on his innocence, but admitted he went to Hillview to meet Kelp. He missed trolley connections, or he would have been there some three hours earlier. He says that, although Kelp had seriously wronged him, he had long since lost all desire for revenge, through the uplifting influence of your League, and insists that his only motive in meeting the decedent was to profit by the latter's offer of financial assistance, as hinted at in the letter."

"He always declared Kelp was more guilty than he of the robbery, having planned it," broke in Mr. Adison. "If ever I saw a man truly repentant it is Jenkins Homes. I can not believe that he killed the man."

"Arriving at the village," dryly continued Mr. Butterworth, "Homes says he hastened to the appointed place and met Kelp. He addressed him, he avers, but received no reply. He spoke again, and then—from Kelp's posture—he decided he must be drunk, and he reached out his hand and shook him by the shoulder. Instantly Kelp collapsed and fell to the ground, he says. Horrified, he bent over him, only to find the man was cold in death. In a tumult of confusion, yet vaguely realizing the peril of his situation, he gave way to a natural impulse and fled. Now is there anything new you can contribute?"

Mr. Adison sighed dolefully. "You seem to have all the facts, except I can not make myself believe Homes is guilty."

"Your belief is hardly a fact," gently reminded the old lawyer.

"His arrest is an awful blow to our League," lamented Mr. Adison. "We had expected so much in his case. We had found him honorable employment—even a position of trust—where his employers were willing to coöperate with us in doing what has always been considered hazardous—giving employment to a man who has a prison record. The press has exploited it not a little, you know."

"All of which is not germane to Homes's guilt or innocence," shortly said Mr. Butterworth. "What steps have you taken to procure evidence that will be helpful to the accused?"

"Why—what steps could I take?" blankly asked Mr. Adison. "The coroner has the facts."

"And yet, even before the noon editions gave me a clear story of the crime, I bestirred myself. Directly after you phoned me, Jethuel started for Hillview. Thanks to the wisdom of the coroner and the isolation of the spot, but few had visited the scene of the tragedy."

"But what good could that do?" cried Mr. Adison.

"I HAVE invited you here to learn," rejoined the old lawyer. "I also thought it worth while to get in touch with our district attorney and ascertain something about Kelp's recent history. I was much edified."

He picked up a page of notes. "Here is the gist of my knowledge. While Homes was reforming in prison, Kelp was continuing his evil ways, only exercising more caution, because of his former danger and his narrow escape from conviction on the robbery charge. For years he has been associated with a ring of gamblers, and was known by the police to be a dangerous gangster. Recently, it seems, he had a falling out with his pals and was rash enough to threaten them with his vengeance. Of course war was instantly declared."

"What has the poor man's sins to do with Homes's predicament?" helplessly demanded Mr. Adison, as Mr. Butterworth paused and critically followed the antics of a rusty English sparrow on his window ledge.

"The enraged gamblers," continued Mr. Butterworth, "decided it to be the prudent course to move very cautiously against Kelp. This, because of the district attorney's recent war upon them. A few months ago, and Kelp would have been shot down without any fuss; but of late, caution has been the password. Yet Kelp had to be silenced, for the city has been deeply stirred over recent developments. Do you see?"

"It's all Greek to me," puzzled Mr. Adison. "I'm not interested in Kelp and his enemies. I only want to prove Homes is innocent."

"The case against him is perfect, if certain discrepancies do not outweigh it,"

Digitized by Google

gravely declared Mr. Butterworth. "I am waiting now for Jethuel to bring in the verdict—either the chair or freedom for Homes. You see, no criminal ever lived who could plan out every detail in a crime without leaving behind some incriminating inference. Often the authorities walk blindly over these telltale clues and signs—but they are always there. Had Kelp been killed in broad daylight, in the midst of a noonday crush in any congested part of our city, the fixing of the guilt would have been most difficult. The very wealth of possible eyewitnesses would confound the prosecution. Now to the mistake made by the guilty person in the Kelp case:

"Jethuel, pursuant to my instructions never to overlook the trifling and seemingly immaterial, examined the cigar-butt immediately on reaching Hillview. It was originally four and a half inches long—we know the brand—and had been burned nearly to the end, which had been chewed to a rag. But a most minute and, in part, microscopic, examination of the spot where Kelp was killed failed to reveal a single trace of cigar-ashes."

The old lawyer paused triumphantly.

"I see," blankly muttered Mr. Adison.

"You do not see," calmly corrected Mr. Butterworth. "Fortunately, it is not necessary for you to see. But tell me this. How could a man, on a still night, smoke up at least four inches of a cigar without dropping some ashes on his clothes, on the fence against which he leaned, or on the ground?"

"You mean?" hopefully cried Mr. Adison.

"I mean Kelp never smoked the cigar found loosely held between his fingers," chuckled Mr. Butterworth.

Mr. Adison frowned heavily, and at last surrendered. "For the life of me I can't see how that fact clears Homes."

"It doesn't," cheerfully assured Mr. Butterworth. "But, taken with the information my assistant is so slow in sending me, it becomes pivotal."

Mr. Adison shook his head despairingly. "Try it this way," gently encouraged the old lawyer. "If Kelp didn't smoke that cigar—and if no ashes can be found I argue no one smoked it at that spot—the man who says he saw Kelp smoking early in the evening must be a liar. But why should he lie about it unless he be connected with the murder? And if a *particeps criminis*, why should he assume the risk of coming forward and offering that particular bit of evidence—in itself quite immaterial? Why should he be eager to have the coroner believe that Kelp was smoking a cigar at the hour of eight?"

"It's incomprehensible," mumbled Mr. Adison.

"A man's motive is never incomprehensible, unless he be a madman," smiled Mr. Butterworth. "Remember, Kelp was found dead. Homes admits touching him, but says he fell over. Now why should this commercial traveler say he saw Kelp smoking? Not to prove Kelp was there, for he was found there, dead."

"What under the sun did he say it for, then?" loudly exploded Mr. Adison.

Mr. Butterworth straightened and, shaking his finger impressively, slowly replied: "Because he wanted to show that Kelp was alive when Homes arrived on the late car, whereas, as a matter of fact, he was dead when first seen leaning against the fence!"

"Good heavens!" gasped the astounded cleric.

"IF MY theory be correct," calmly continued Mr. Butterworth, "my assistant should by this time be telephoning me the culminating fact. And if my theory be correct, it shows Kelp was killed before being placed against the fence, *rigor mortis* doubtless having set in. It will also transpire that he was stabbed to death in a closed automobile. Then the car drew up to this isolated spot in Hillview. The crime had been carefully rehearsed. The murderers knew only one house was to be feared. And I have no doubt the woman witness' attention was distracted from anything that occurred near the tannery when Kelp's lifeless form was propped up against the fence, with one arm hooked over the pickets to hold him in position. Then the cigar-stub was placed between the dead fingers—the cigar-stub which up to that moment had been savagely chewed by one of the assassins—and a witness was schooled to state he saw him smoking at eight o'clock. Remember, the murderers expected Homes to arrive earlier in the evening. It was only a slim chance that allowed the inert form to remain there so long without being detected by some passer-by."

Mr. Adison, completely confused, ruffled his gray hair wildly and finally blurted:

Digitized by Google

"But how on earth did the murderers know that Homes was coming to Hillview to interview Kelp?"

Mr. Butterworth chuckled softly. "Don't you see? It was one of the assassins who arranged the meeting between the two men. He must have written Kelp, breathing bloody revenge unless Kelp kept the appointment, and then signed Homes's name. Kelp, probably, was warned to say nothing and not to reply to the letter, but to be at the place designated. Now Kelp was in serious trouble. He may have regretted his break with the ring. He couldn't afford to have a released convict, one he had bitterly wronged, on his trail. He decided to meet Homes, possibly intending to quiet him with a sum of money. He was watched day and night and, when he set forth, the murderers in the automobile were ready to pick him up.

"At the same time, so the cigar-stub tells me, the assassin wrote the decoy-letter to Homes, urging immediate travel to Hillview. He hinted at substantial financial aid, as a restitution for the wrongs of the past. To this he signed Kelp's name. Of course the writer knew of the old trouble between the two men, and also knew to the hour when Homes would be released from prison. And Homes went to Hillview."

"You astound me," weakly exclaimed Mr. Adison. "I believed Homes to be innocent—and yet I couldn't understand how he didn't do it. My heart told me his conversion was sincere. My reason insisted he was led into the crime by a sudden outburst of passion, once he faced the man who, as he believed, had wronged him. But will the authorities accept your solution of the crime?"

"If that sluggard Jethuel will send me the word I am expecting, I will prove absolutely that Homes is innocent. My theory, deduced from the fragment of a cigar, hinges absolutely upon one fact."

As he thus assured the cleric, the telephone buzzed and, with brightening eyes, he removed the receiver.

"Yes, Jethuel, it is I," he murmured. "What! Both broken? Completely broken down? Good! Our case is complete. Come home."

Turning to his bewildered friend, Mr. Butterworth gravely announced: "The all-important fact is confirmed. We will now admit in evidence the testimony of the dead man himself. The arches of Kelp's feet are flattened, completely collapsed."

"You don't tell me," exclaimed Mr. Adison blankly.

"The arch of the foot is maintained by the muscles in the calf of the leg," explained Mr. Butterworth in a professorial voice. "The foot itself has scarcely any muscle structure; the wedge-shaped bones in the arch being of themselves insufficient to support the weight of the body. Stand a dead man on his feet and the arches will collapse. The coroner's case proves that Kelp fell to the ground the moment Homes is alleged to have stabbed him. If Homes killed him, he would not have remained on his feet long enough for the leg-muscles to relax and let down the arches. The evidence furnished by Kelp himself in incontrovertible. Had the body been discovered immediately after Homes ran away, the coroner's physician would have known the accused could not have killed the man, as *rigor mortis* would have been too far developed. But remaining undiscovered as it did, this physiological clue was lost."

"Then Homes is really innocent," gasped Mr. Adison.

"Absolutely. He couldn't be believed guilty even if he confessed. Nature declares his innocence," triumphantly cried Mr. Butterworth. "The trail now leads to the man who 'saw Kelp smoking.' When found, we'll be on track of the real murderers. It had been an interesting case and has helped me endure the tedium of my captivity. I feel much better. I must return to office-work to-morrow. We're retained in the Ardmore case, you know, and I fear Jethuel may bungle it."

Digitized by Google

THE OUTLAW HIMSELF

FURTHER ADVENTURES of the VICARIOUS OUTLAW

By Eugene P. Lyle Jr.

"NOW, then, Mr. U. S. Marshal," said the General Manager of the Katy Railway, with a curt gesture out the Pullman window, "suppose you deploy your sawed-off-shotgun boys over into my car on the siding yonder, and I'll try to land you in the same county with Pete Rogers by morning. The real Pete Rogers, understand? It frets passengers getting robbed, but his cleaning out our pay-car—now," said the G. M.," that's going too far."

The bushy-browed marshal growled under the wry sarcasm. He felt mightily foolish over having garrisoned the Katy southbound express against attack, while Cap Rogers was plundering the north-bound up near Dallas, but the distillation of gall itself was to have the news of it from the G. M., who, with an engine hitched to his private car, had hastened up from Waco to intercept him.

"Now you, Molly——" The G. M. turned to his daughter when the marshal had started forward through the train to gather his deputies. "Why aren't you up in Kansas helping your Ma with the dishes, 'stead of riding round heading off your Dad? But you'll have to stay on here as passenger, and wait for me in Waco. There won't be room in my car——"

"Oh, *won't* there!" exclaimed Molly. "And you'd let me miss the fun, Dad? But just wait. Wait till I——" She was already tightening her loosened coils of hair, with hairpins from her mouth, as she hastened back to her stateroom.

Young Sanderson, now merely a passenger also present, stirred uneasily. Without that Kansas girl aboard, he suddenly perceived, travel would be dismal indeed.

"Beg pardon, sir," he called, rather desperately, to her father, who was hastening out, "but I—don't you think—I say, maybe you'll need me on that marshal's posse?"

The G. M. stopped, buttoned his raincoat to his neck, twisted his cigar about in his mouth, and humorously surveyed young F. Crittenden Sanderson.

"Haven't you been having your money's worth?" he asked solicitously.

Sanderson caught the quizzical twinkle in the G. M.'s eyes and shook his head emphatically.

"Sorry you were disappointed, but,"

Digitized by Google

explained the G. M., "this road don't guarantee hold-ups, you know. They're extra and——"

"I'd hate to miss the fun," Sanderson murmured regretfully.

Molly's words! Another good little sport! The General Manager softened.

"Always did have a weakness for children," he derided himself.

Besides, just now, when the south-bound had mistaken the G. M. and the G. M.'s torpedoes for Pete Rogers's gang, this young, chance passenger had been very impulsive about defending Molly from any and every possible brigand who showed his head in the Pullman. Molly's father had not overlooked that, in the recent comedy of blunders.

"Come on, then," he ordered. "Frank, said your name was? Come on then, Frank."

Sanderson needed but a moment to snatch his suit-case from his berth, after which he knocked at the door of Molly's stateroom.

"Oh, you?" she exclaimed, puzzled, when she opened the door, plump, pleasant and rosy-cheeked, her dressing-sack changed to a crisp, white shirt-waist, her rakish Panama on her head, an umbrella in her hand.

"I told your father I'd see you over," said Sanderson, with formal dignity.

The sunny friendliness in her brown eyes, bestowed unaffectedly on conductors and brakemen, died out before his collegiate parlor-manners.

"You're very kind, I'm sure," she said.

But, vexed with herself as well as with him, she stepped past him into the corridor, leaving him to follow with her suit-case and his own.

"I thought," she said, while he raised her umbrella to help her down the steps into the drizzling rain, "I thought at first that you were going along to help us capture Pete Rogers."

He knew that accent of mockery.

"Why, I am," he informed her, as for an instant she was in his arms before she alighted on the muddy roadbed.

"Poor Captain Rogers!" he heard her laugh.

She caught the umbrella close over her head and her skirts in her other hand, and ran through the darkness to the brilliantly lighted private car on the siding. He took up the suit-cases and followed.

THE car was fairly crowded. The marshal and his armed and booted Indian Territory deputies overflowed the half-dozen luxurious chairs to standing-room only. Molly, after thanking Sanderson with exasperating precision, let the light of good-fellowship slip back into her eyes as she greeted them, and declined, en masse, all the luxurious chairs, which were instantly vacated.

"No," she said, "I'll have a nap on the bunk in Dad's office. But promise to call me when the shooting begins."

They promised eagerly.

The south-bound having pulled out, the G. M. ordered his car on the main track, and they were quickly headed north, at wild speed, after Pete Rogers's desperadoes.

Two or three freights in their path had been forewarned, and gave them a clear track. For hours they rocked and swayed through the stormy night, and did not stop until they reached Scrub Oak, which was a condemned box-car holding a telegraph-instrument and a station-agent.

Scrub Oak was twenty-two miles south of Dallas, and close to the scene of the hold-up. The General Manager's secretary opened a window of the private car, and under it appeared the station-agent, with a lantern.

No, said the agent, he'd heard nothing new of the robbers, though the wire had been kept hot. A special had brought ten Rangers, with their horses, from Dallas, and they'd been let off at the hold-up place, where he reckoned they'd taken the trail of the bandits.

"Know Pete Rogers when you see him?" asked the secretary.

"No."

"Well, here's his photo. Take a look, and if anybody comes prowling around who——"

"Ask him to have a seat, and wait for us," snorted the G. M., jerking the bell-cord.

The engine yanked them on again through a dripping cedar forest. But they had not gone a dozen miles when they were stopped by a lantern at a shanty station, and the agent excitedly handed up a despatch.

The secretary read aloud:

Fellow answering description here now. Come back quick.

"Back where?" demanded the marshal.

Digitized by Google

"Back to Scrub Oak."

They were already backing, at a nod from the G. M.

IT WAS impossible to hope. Pete Rogers would be no such fool. In advance, they berated the Scrub Oak agent for an hysterical gourd-head, and then flooded the Scrub Oak box-car—to discover the original of the Pete Rogers photograph stretched on the one bench, flabby, pasty-jowled, hair close-cropped, his flashy clothes soaked, the red and yellow tie, with the diamond, now like a daub of junk paint!

At the commotion he sat up, blinked and yawned drowsily.

"Correct," said the marshal, snapping the handcuffs on him.

"Hey, now, friend," he began to protest.

"No use, Pete," the marshal stopped him. "Didn't know we'd have your picture from the Leavenworth pen, did you?"

"What's more," chirruped the station-agent, certain of promotion, "he give hisself away. Comes in here all mud-spattered, asks when the first train is due, an' strips off a brace o' six-shooters."

"H'm," mused the G. M., "curious."

"What is?" snapped the marshal.

He was vaguely dissatisfied with this easy capture.

"Oh, nothing," returned the G. M.; "that is to say, 'most everything."

"Remember, too, how he fooled us yesterday," young Sanderson reminded them. "Said he was a jewelry-drummer, and he was so afraid of Pete Rogers he had to get off the train at Dallas."

A mocking leer flared in the man's eyes.

"Why, is it you, cull?" he greeted the indignant Sanderson.

"Drummer?" repeated the agent." Why, he did have a sample-case——"

"Where is it?" demanded the G. M. "Oh——"

He snatched the sample-case from under the bench. "Now maybe we'll find some of the loot from the pay-car."

He ripped the case open, but it was not stuffed with the expected greenbacks. There were cardboards of gaudy adornment that shone like gilded tin, gold or brass, gems of crystal.

"My jullry, see?" observed their captive frankly, grinning at them.

"Don't matter, Pete," declared the marshal. "We got you anyway."

He motioned to two deputies to bring him out.

"What's this?"

Sanderson drew a money-belt from beneath the imitation finery, and instantly the prisoner snatched at it with his manacled hands.

The G. M. seized the belt. It was of rattlesnake-skin, with leather strips for a cinch.

"Empty—eh, what?"

A white poker chip rolled out. The prisoner ducked, grabbing for it. The marshal covered it with his boots while the deputies held the captive. The marshal picked up the chip. Scrawled letters were printed on each side with a pencil. He read:

Pete We aint playing you dirt pete we will open the pot square at uncle joe s

"And that pot," announced the G. M., "is my pay-car. What's the use, though? We're as much in the dark as ever. 'Uncle Joe' may be anybody, anywhere."

"No," said the agent, while the prisoner struggled and cursed and threatened him, "no, there's a fellow everybody calls 'Uncle Joe' with a shack off yonder in the woods 'bout two miles. Off an' on the Gov'ment tries to catch him moonshinin'."

"Then you're deputized," said the marshal. "You'll show us the way. How's that?" he went on, turning to the G. M. "We'll round up the gang and the swag too."

"And Captain Pete here?"

"I'll detail a man to take him on with you to Dallas. The rest of you boys come along now. We'll square ourselves yet."

With his posse behind him and the agent at his side the marshal hastened off through the woods, now gray and sodden in the wet dawn. The G. M., with his secretary, Sanderson, and the one deputy, holding the prisoner, went back to the private car, which in no time at all was rolling placidly northward toward Dallas.

II

MISS MOLLY was already at breakfast when they entered. She was buttering a hot roll. A little silver sirup-pitcher stood on the table at her elbow.

Digitized by Google

"If you really didn't want me, Dad," she declared accusingly as they came in, "you wouldn't keep maple-sirup always in stock. Oh!" She saw the new face among them; saw also the handcuffs on his wrists.

"Yes," said her father, "this is the distinguished Captain Rogers, Molly. We've got him, and we'll get——"

He stopped. Behind him the prisoner was saying, "Take off my hat before ladies."

But with his hat, a flat derby, still on his head, he brushed past his guard and sat himself down opposite the girl. He planted his elbows on the table, the chain linking his hands like a suspension-bridge between them, and looked her over deliberately.

"——!" he said slowly, "if I'd knowed yesterday on the south-bound that you was such a prize-package for looks, it never would of been the north-bound that got held up. No, sir. You'll 'scuse it, won't you, lady? And besides—" he gazed out the window; gazed at the cedars slipping by—"it ain't too late yet. No, sir."

The astounded General Manager came to his senses and took the rascal by the collar, but before he could jerk him to his feet he lost his own footing and went crashing over chairs toward the front door.

Air was hissing. Wheels were screeching. The engine had thrown on brakes. The car came drunkenly to a standstill. Outside, men with soiled handkerchiefs bound up to their eyes were aiming guns at the windows.

"Hands up, everybody. Balance all."

They were on both platforms, and sang out the command as they flung open the doors.

Hands went up universally, except Molly's little plump ones.

"Why, Cap, these cuff-links?" exclaimed one gay desperado. With a cold-chisel from his pocket and his revolver for a hammer—he quickly relieved the prisoner of his shackles.

"Now strip the car," ordered the prisoner, taking charge. "The G. M.'s watch. Thank you."

"It'll be poor picking, this car," said the G. M.

"Oh, I don't know," said the outlaw chief. "We'd tapped a wire, see, and knowed you was coming. Thought you'd put one over on Pete Rogers, didn't you?"

"I remember thinking it was curious," said the G. M.

"An' 'twould be, friend, if Mr. Marshal and Co. round up the gang and the swag at Uncle Joe's. Boys, you ought uh seen 'em just a-uprooting trees to git there!"

"I said," repeated the G. M., "that you'd find this car poor picking. It seems that you have."

"As much as sayin'," said the brigand, "that Pete Rogers went an' miscalculated, eh?"

The G. M. nodded.

"But how 'bout," queried Pete, "how 'bout my picking a daisy?"

And, as if by way of casual illustration, he patted Molly on the cheek.

Instantly, though disarmed, young Sanderson struck with his fist. Naturally, he was floor d at once by two of the thugs. Molly's father was already held fast. But Molly? Molly sprang to her feet, sirup-pitcher in hand, and dashed it squarely in Captain Rogers's face. The sirup was hot. Rogers blindly clawed the air. His men merrily hooted, but helped him to the lavatory.

"That," said the chief, coming back, and taking off his hat to Molly, "that will cost papa a thousand more."

He turned on the G. M. His prison pallor was burned a lobster red.

"Yessir, a thousand. 'Leven thousand in all. No, needn't mention no check. Rope him, boys. No, Mr. G. M., you'll chase along to Dallas and cash your check yourself. An' bring back the money to Scrub Oak. Alone, understand, except for the engineer. Doin' which, you'll find your daisy safe. But," said Captain Rogers, "blamed if I don't jus' keep this here m'lasses-pitcher."

The outlaws bundled the indignant girl off the car. Her father, great beads of agony on his forehead, they left bound in a chair, as well as the secretary, deputy-marshal, cook and crew. Only the engineer was left untrussed. And one other. For they had overlooked young Sanderson, who lay apparently stunned on the floor of the car.

OUTSIDE with their captive, the bandits flung their guns to their shoulders, and ordered the engineer to open the throttle. Which he did. None saw young Sanderson, who had crawled to the platform, and had rolled himself off from the opposite side. They were

Digitized by Google

already mounting their horses when they heard him groan. In fact, he groaned so that they could hear him.

"It's that cub what tried to smash you, Cap'n," said one of the robbers. "Sha'n't we——"

"Don't." said Sanderson. "I'm good for a ransom, too."

"An' —— help him if he ain't," said Rogers. "Tie his hands and put him on a horse."

"Now what," demanded Molly of young Sanderson, as they rode away perforce among their captors, "was the use of doing that?"

"Doing what?" asked Sanderson.

He felt meek. He didn't know but that he had been ridiculous.

"You know what," she retorted. "Getting yourself taken, of course, and perhaps killed, later."

"But I was afraid they might—might hurt you, you know."

There was one flash of indulgence in her widening brown eyes, but she looked at his roped hands and laughed, in vexed impatience.

"Lots you'd do," she scoffed, "except to be killed."

"Wonder where they'll take us," Sanderson parried.

"Some robbers' cave, I guess."

This was more scorn of him as an impractical youth. The cedar woods were hardly more than an extended grove. There were no mountains, no wild gorges, no cavernous recesses. Where, indeed, might a large band of hunted outlaws hide themselves?

The question was worthy of so resourceful and bold a desperado as Pete Rogers. And the answer, when they came to it, left them amazed for its very simplicity, which was a gem of insolence.

They had taken to the middle of a shallow creek. They followed the creek barely a mile into the woods, when they came to a wagon-road that dipped down the gentle bank and crossed it. They turned into this road, and rode into a small clearing, where a number of wagons were loaded with logs. Off in the woods, a shrill steam-whistle blew; the whistle of a sawmill.

"Seven o'clock, boys," announced the brigand chief.

The boys dismounted and began hitching horses to the loaded wagons. Some of them took up axes and fell to work cutting timber.

"You two'll have to ride a wagon the rest of the way," said Pete Rogers.

He came to help Molly dismount. Another outlaw, the gayest and youngest one—found himself there to help her also.

"You needn't bother," she said; but, though she started to get off alone, the gay young outlaw deliberately caught her about the waist and, as he let her to the ground, his bold, smouldering, handsome black eyes took fire.

He would have kissed her, except that Rogers seized him by the collar and jerked him back. Rogers cursed the man, who retorted hotly, and it was plain that the first worry since the commencement of this enterprise was beginning to possess the nonchalant chief.

Molly noticed it, even in her blaze of anger, and her bright wits began to work hard, hard.

"Is it far yet?" she asked. "Couldn't we walk?"

"Yes, you can," said Rogers, "and I'll walk with you."

He glanced once at his mutinous young outlaw, who was talking low to several others of the band, loosened the revolver in its holster on his right hip, and said: "Come on."

He walked between Molly and Sanderson.

ALL three were plodding glumly in the muddy road, when Molly spoke. "Don't you think, Captain, you'd feel easier if you were rid of me?"

Rogers started. "Eh, why so, now?"

"Oh, just because, you know. Besides," she added hastily, repressing a shudder at the danger to herself so lately revealed in the ardor of the young outlaw's black eyes, "besides, these frills on plain train-robbing, they may be the fashion in Macedonia, but they won't—no, they won't likely take well in the United States."

"Meanin'?"

"I mean holding people for ransom, and especially a girl. No, that really won't take well. Maybe you can dodge Rangers and sheriffs, but now you'll have the whole voting population of this nation against you, and if you think you won't be hunted down—shot down, too——"

"Oh, *them!*"

The chief made a gesture of disdain.

"All right," said Molly. "But I know some others you are afraid of."

Digitized by Google

"That so, lady? Now who, please ma'am?"

"Your own men."

Despite himself, worry again touched the robber. Ordinary loot, from the express company and passengers' pockets, cemented discipline, but a pretty girl in the plunder—well, the chief was already perceiving how upsetting a pretty girl might be. A disturbing peach of discord, she! Indeed, if he might find a way out, and not lose a cent?

"Now, Mr. Sanderson here," Molly went on cunningly, though she began to falter, "Mr. Sanderson and—and I, you know——"

She stopped. Sanderson looked at her, puzzled. He was more than puzzled to see that she was blushing violently. Yet the memory of the mutinous outlaw and his black eyes forced her on to self-preservation.

"I mean," she blurted forth, biting her lip, "that Dad objects, and we—Mr. Sanderson and I—we were planning to—to——"

"Fool that I am!" gasped Sanderson to himself, as he saw the light, and cried: "Exactly! We were planning to elope!"

"Ye-yes, that's it," said Molly faintly.

"I see," said Captain Rogers. It was the way out. "And if I help, what——"

"Oh, we will not tell a thing," promised Molly. "Not where you hide yourselves, or *any*thing."

"Wouldn't matter if you did," said Rogers. "But about my eleven thousand?"

"My ransom, you mean? Oh, you can take that away from Dad when he brings it. But the point is, you see, to get me—us—away before—before Dad comes."

Or before the mutinous outlaw might forget himself. Captain Rogers understood perfectly. Here was the gist of his own worry.

They had to step out of the way for the log-wagons behind them. One could not believe that the drivers were train-robbers. The robbers had vanished more completely than in any cave. He of the black eyes was on the last wagon. He lifted his old slouch hat, and smiled at Molly.

"Say, friend," Rogers abruptly turned on Sanderson, "can you shoot?"

Of course no city youth will deny that he can shoot. Sanderson modestly admitted that he could.

"Then—" Rogers waited for the last wagon to roll out of sight around the next bend—"take these, they're loaded. Now, you're free. We won't go on to the sawmill. You an' your bride duck into the woods here. Straight on, an' you'll hit the railroad. But hustle. I'll give your regards to papa."

Young Sanderson felt his hands free; felt a six-shooter in each one; looked at Molly, beautifully flushed, and felt himself a man, a giant, a phalanx.

"Come on, Miss Molly," he cried.

She ran to him.

"Goose," she whispered angrily, "not *Miss* Molly. If he thinks we're not eloping——"

Young Sanderson, reddening like a beet, put his arm about her.

"Come on, dear," he said distinctly.

She sprang back. Rogers, watching them, bade them put off their spats till later. They'd have plenty of time then.

"Only vamoose, that's the trick," he urged.

They did, while he guarded their retreat. Running, they were soon in the densest part of the wood.

"You're out of breath, Miss Molly," said Sanderson. "We might go a little slower now."

She gave him a quick little grateful look. "Miss Molly?" she repeated. He understood. He wasn't taking advantage. But, she asked herself, didn't she know, didn't she feel, that he wouldn't? Of course. It was his stiff dignity, aloofness, punctilio, that had provoked her so. If only, she thought, he were more masterful, really masterful! Like her father, for instance.

She put her hand to her breast.

"Listen," she panted, "what's that?"

A MAN was crashing through some brush. He came striding toward them. He was the black-eyed one.

"Or like *him*, for another instance," she thought again, despite her sudden terror.

"Well now," said Black Eyes, gazing on her, "leavin' us, are you? I figgered Pete was up to somethin'. But you, bub—" he waved an arm at Sanderson—"you can run on, if you want."

Young Sanderson felt himself a phalanx, a brigade, an army corps. He was mad.

"Come," he said, "with us."

Black Eyes had not in his mathematics

Digitized by Google

figured on a brace of six-shooters. As Sanderson drew them, he dodged and sprang. Sanderson dropped his weapons, stooped, met the rush, had his man about the knees. He rose under the weight, charged under it. The man toppled over his shoulder flat to the ground. Wheeling, Sanderson was on him. He had to strike, with his fists, for the man was restless. At last:

"Now will you come?"

And Black Eyes: "Lemme up, pard. I'll come."

"You hold the pistols, Miss Molly," said Sanderson. "Hold them on him." He turned white. "Lord, when I think what he—— Thank God, I threw them away!"

Molly obeyed, but her great brown eyes were on Sanderson, wonderingly. "Or as his own self, for a last instance," she thought.

They gained the railroad with their prisoner. They waited till noon before anything came. Then it was a freight, southward-bound. They flagged it. Their prisoner was locked in a box-car. They themselves were entertained in the caboose.

AT SCRUB OAK, they stopped. The General Manager's private car was on the switch.

"Did you pay Captain Rogers the money?" Molly asked her father.

The G. M. twisted his cigar in his mouth in his wry way.

"I did," he said.

"I told him to collect," said Molly.

"He did," said the G. M.

"And the marshal, Dad?"

"The marshal and posse," said the G. M., "returned from Uncle Joe's before I arrived, but in time to catch this morning's Flyer back to the Indian Territory. Your friend Captain Rogers explained to me that you had eloped, Molly."

Sanderson spoke up.

"We've put it off to ask you first. Haven't we, Molly?"

Molly nodded vigorously. She was beautifully red.

"So?" said the G. M. "The Captain asked me to present, with his compliments—where is the thing?"

And from his pocket he brought forth the private car's silver sirup-pitcher!

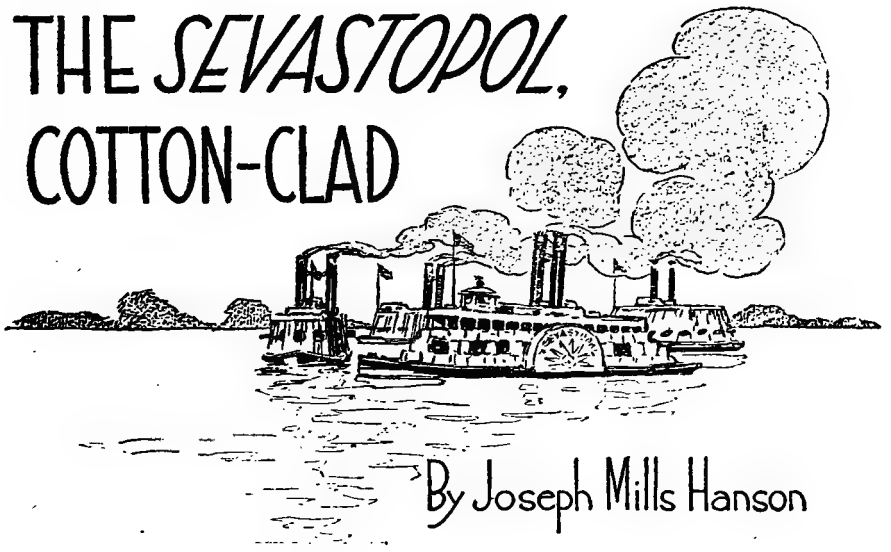
MORE ROOM

By
TOM GRAHAM

I WHO have wanted the world for room,
I could not rest in a narrow tomb.
Let the illimitable fire
Feed on my bones to its last desire,
And with my ashes delight the sea.
There will be room, and repose, for me!

Digitized by Google

THE *SEVASTOPOL*, COTTON-CLAD



By Joseph Mills Hanson

ON AN evening during the latter days of April, 1864, a squadron of United States war vessels lay in one of the tortuous bends of the Red River of Louisiana, some hundreds of miles above the junction of that stream with the Mississippi. Isolated by the rapid movements of the flotilla to which they belonged and the army with which they had been coöperating, their situation had become one of extreme peril. This river, treacherous at all times, by reason of the innumerable cut-offs and bayous through which its waters may dissipate, was falling rapidly.

In consequence the heavy ships of the fleet had fled down-stream on the breast of the subsiding flood, and now lay many miles below, unable to return. The army, likewise, suffering from reverses, had retired southward, leaving these four light-draft vessels, which had delayed beyond reason in the vain hope of floating a foundered gunboat, to shift for themselves.

Rendered arrogant and aggressive by the intoxication of a successful campaign, the enemy had for three days been exerting every effort to annihilate this fragment of antagonism, which, like an arrow-head broken off in the flesh, continued to inflame its vitals. The tiny squadron slowly dragged itself down the river amidst overwhelming foes, meeting with brief respite from struggle only, as now, at those points where the banks were too naked of vegetation to afford concealment to the assailants.

The day was approaching its end and already the disk of the sun was corrugated by the rim of the westward forest. On every side of the little fleet, which lay huddled together in the middle of the river like a flock of frightened ducklings, was silence. But it was such a silence as intervenes between the convulsions of a volcano. It was fraught with ominous possibilities.

The dark walls of the forest, distant a short space on either hand, gave the impression of concealing peering eyes, and from the precipitous banks of the bend behind them, which they had passed but a few moments before, shadows were already creeping out, as if eager to form a mantle for conspiracies. Below them the waters of the river were ruffled and muddy, where the current passed with a muffled roar over a formidable reef of rocks stretching entirely across the channel.

It was for this reason that the two light-armored gunboats, or "tin-clads," and the two river transports, or "cotton-clads," had halted, despite the urgent need for haste, and now lay inert in midstream with paddle-wheels slowly plashing against the current.

Summoned by a call from the flag-ship, the four Captains had gathered in the pilot-house of that vessel. The object of their

Digitized by Google

meeting was to devise, if possible, some means of escape from their present hazardous position. Of the officers in the assemblage, one carried an arm in a sling and another wore a dirty bandage about his head, both evidences of recent injuries.

All bore the appearance of brave men, yet all, with possibly one exception, showed on their faces the wrinkles of fatigue and anxiety, for their courage and judgment were being put to a novel test. Given their squadron around them, or their army on the shore behind, they would have faced unnumbered foes calmly. But, trapped in a mud-hole, with the very river on which they floated rearing up its bottom before them, deserted by their comrades and surrounded by limitless, sepulchral forests which, at any moment and from any quarter, might spew forth a deluge of yelling foes, they knew not which way to turn.

The pilot of the flag-ship stood with one foot thrust through the lower spokes of the great steering-wheel, his hand extended in an exasperated gesture toward the tumbling water in front.

"Look!" he cried. "Look at that channel and then ask me if I'll try it! Not six inches in spots. No, Commander, no!"

"I wish Dave Marsh was here," said the senior officer, sneeringly. "He'd not stop for a little wind riffle."

"Wind riffle!" The pilot ground his teeth. "Commander, will you put a boat's-crew out there to sound us through?"

"No, not to be shot from the banks before they could catch stroke."

"Well," cried the wounded transport-captain, petulantly, flinging himself around and walking rapidly up and down across the narrow house, "seems to me it's better'n stayin' trapped here, to be shot after dark."

His glance swept the black woods nervously. No one paid any heed to him.

"Bull," appealed the pilot to the second steamboat-man, who stood in the rear, "do you reckon the *Sevastopol* would carry through?"

The other's lips trembled into a grim smile under their heavy fringe of beard. He stared at the questioner calmly.

"Don't know, John," he replied. "Dump the siege-guns, maybe."

"Then throw them overboard," said the Commander, "if that's all that stands in the way of our making the attempt."

The other gunboat-captain, a beardless young naval officer, interposed. "If she throws away her ordnance, Frank, she'll have to be fired. We can't defend her."

"Well, for ——'s sake, let's do something!" cried the first transportman. "Let's not stay here forever waitin' for the rebels to tear us to pieces."

He gripped his mangled arm and cursed savagely, as a spasm of pain seized it.

The pilot was livid. He turned on the speaker fiercely.

"You fool, would you rather fight the rebels on whole boats up here or on bottomless wrecks down there? I tell you, I'd run Alexandria Rapids on a toothpick sooner'n try to take this tin-clad across that rock shoal."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" exclaimed the Commander, soothingly, raising his hand. "Let us be calm. This is no time for the display of temper. We are in a very serious position, and we must consider it seriously. Pilot, have you any suggestions to offer?"

"Yes. It's been cloudy all day, in the north. You can see lightning now. Perhaps it has rained. If it has, we'll get a rise by morning that may carry us over. My advice is, throw drag-anchors, stay together in midstream and—wait. If we're attacked, then——"

"*When* we are attacked," corrected the Commander.

"——stay close and fight together," continued the pilot. "The rebels can't swim out and take us."

"They can riddle us with shrapnel."

"No better lying still than moving."

"They can cut the steerin' gear an' steam-pipes."

"And scald us to death."

"Bank the fires," said the pilot.

"I can seem to think of nothing better," mused the Commander. "Gentlemen, what do you say? Lieutenant Richards?"

"Stay, since it offers the only chance. We can at least give an account of ourselves which the service will be proud to remember."

"Captain Sullivan?"

"Oh, stay, if we've got to. I'd rather be killed fightin' for a chance, though, than potted off like a shootin' gallery Topsy."

"Captain Bull?"

"Anything's satisfactory to me."

"Yes, it seems to be," growled Sullivan. "You don't seem to give a cuss whether we pull through this thing or not."

Digitized by Google

"I don't," returned the other, unruffled, and a moment later, with the same unperturbed manner, he descended the covered pilot-house stairs in company with the other officers and repaired to his own vessel, to make final preparations for the night.

THE thicket-fringed shore gave forth no sound as the small boats passed. It was still daylight.

In those shallow waters it is no great task to fix a ship securely in any position. Whatever heavy object may be cast overboard, attached to a line, will bury itself in the yielding, sandy bottom and remain immovable. The vessels, therefore, were warped as close together as they could be without putting them in danger of grinding, and secured. They thus formed a quadrilateral, with broadsides looking in all directions, and each of these faces was amply supplied with guns, large and small, capable of covering its projected plane with a scathing sheet of missiles.

The appearance of the fleet, after these dispositions had been made, was formidable. In the purpling twilight, it seemed an impregnable square, not to be broken by human power.

But there were weaknesses within. Ammunition, especially for the heavy ordnance, was low. Food, also, was scarce. For three days no one had received more than a half ration. The tin-clads, beaten and wrenched in a dozen recent engagements, were not fit for service. In many places their bolted plates had been shaken loose by the impact of shot; in others the wood backing had been sprung, and in still others both plates and backing had been quite splintered through. The stacks were riddled and, when steam was up, stifling smoke filled both engine-room and gun-deck.

The cotton-clads were in scarcely better condition, though, as they had been used until very lately for transport-service only, they had not been subjected to so much severe fire. The armament of the *Sevastopol* consisted of six army siege-guns, 64-pounders, reamed, rifled and banded, and mounted fore, aft and on the broadsides.

They were trophies of one of the enemy's captured earthworks up the river. The *Sevastopol* was bulwarked on the boiler-deck with cotton-bales, arranged two high and two deep. The texas deck was practically razed and the saloon scuttled by the hurricanes of shot through which they had passed.

The other transport was as badly shattered, but still had thirty-nine men left of her crew, while the *Sevastopol* mustered but thirty-three souls.

It was in this deplorable lack of men that the chief weakness of the fleet lay. Only one pilot remained on each of the tin-clads and, among the gun-crews, no supernumeraries were left. Such was the squadron which lay chained to the river bed, as night came down; a quartette of wolves, cut off from the pack, worried, exhausted, waiting for the hounds.

While the stars came out, sounds began to arise, from one shore and then from the other; remote, confused, muffled in the forest, but all-encircling, like the murmurs of a great city heard from some tall tower in its midst. There were rumblings and tramplings and the hum of voices. The gun-detachments, at quarters on the boats, shivered and grew quiet. Suspense conjures up far deeper terrors than action.

A chilly breeze sprang up from the north, and occasionally the play of lightning in that quarter of the horizon illumined the landscape with a fitful, bluish glare. It did not, however, reveal any living presence on the stretches of open ground immediately along the river. All movement was concealed behind the woods.

So obvious was it that no immediate danger need be feared from exposure that several officers were walking about the open decks of the tin-clads, quite beyond the casemates. It was much more comfortable there than inside, and they strolled back and forth, chatting as unconcernedly as though their vessels were lying in dry-dock in some peaceful port. Nevertheless, their eyes were constantly occupied in observing distances and directions along the shores, and their ears in noting the numerous, though indistinct, sounds arising on every side.

CAPTAIN BULL of the *Sevastopol* stood on the bow of his ship, conversing across the few intervening feet of water with the naval Lieutenant commanding the smaller of the tin-clads.

"That, now," said the Captain, breaking a pause during which they had hearkened to certain clankings in the distance, "is another field-battery. It has come through

Digitized by Google

the Lavacca plantation and gone into position behind that bit of a cut-off, the head of which we passed this afternoon. The range is about a thousand yards. Bah! A herd of elephants could lay an ambush better! Rousters! They bungle it with noise."

"You seem familiar with this country, Captain," said the Lieutenant. As has been remarked, he was a mere boy. His voice was deep, and he made the most of it. But the baby pink cheeks and a painful rigor of spine proclaimed him but a fledgling of the Academy.

"I ought to be," replied the Captain. "I've run this river for thirty-five years."

"Great Scott! So long? You must have grown to love it by now." This youth cherished ideals of professional devotion.

The steamboat man regarded him with the curious attention which he might have bestowed upon an unusual bug.

"I used to."

"And now?"

"I hate it."

He spoke, however, with no particular venom.

The Lieutenant appeared surprised.

"You do?" he said. "Then why do you keep on?"

"Because I hate it."

"That's rather curious."

"No."

"No?"

"My family used to live on it."

"And they've moved away?"

"They were murdered."

The tone of his voice expressed neither resentment nor regret. He made simply a statement of fact.

"Murdered! Good ——, Captain——"

"Oh, yes. Some time ago."

"But—not *all*?"

"Yes. Wife, two girls, baby boy."

The Lieutenant knew not how to vocalize his emotion. He began stammering, "Why —why——"

Captain Bull interrupted, as if meditating. "All in one night."

"But those who did it? They have been brought to justice."

"Not yet."

"You know who they are?"

The other inclined his head. "That's why I still run the river," he said.

There was something so sinister in the reply that the questioner scrutinized his companion apprehensively. The latter seemed to him to have suddenly become remote beyond a veil of ominous mystery.

"You are looking for them, then?"

"And they are looking for us."

"Us?"

"The *Sevastopol*. My two sons and three brothers and many nephews and cousins are here. Every man on the boat is a relative. We were many more, some time ago. But we have not wasted ourselves."

"You mean to say this is a feud? You are fighting another family?"

"Exactly."

"And under the mask of legitimate warfare!"

"Wait. I am a Scotchman. Two hundred years ago my clansmen fought with other clans. Is it worse now?"

"But why should they look for *you*? I should think such cowardly brutes would want to avoid you."

Captain Bull glanced at his questioner pityingly.

"My boy, do you suppose my family were permitted to die without retaliation?"

"I fail to see how you could retaliate for such an outrage."

"By doing to them as they did to us!"

The youth's eyes opened in wide horror. He had never dreamed such things.

"Good ——!" he began. "You don't mean that you, a civilized man——"

"Boy," Captain Bull said sternly, "be still. You can't understand. If you had been through it, you might."

A painful pause ensued. Before either of them had broken it, a change took place in their surroundings which caused them at once to forget all save the events of the immediate moment. The last faint streak of daylight was just fading from the west when the manifold rustlings and murmurs on every side came to an abrupt close.

SO suddenly and distinctly did this cessation of sound occur that the Lieutenant started and raised his head, as if awakened from a dream. He glanced about and drew a long breath. Then he stepped back toward the casemate.

"Well, Captain, good evening," he said, with an evident effort to conceal his new feeling of revulsion for the man. "The festivities are about to commence. Keep your men well under cover, fire at the artillery with shell, pay no attention to infantry,

Digitized by Google

and I think we've a fair show to see another sunrise. If you get in distress, let me know and I'll try to help you."

"All right, Lieutenant. Good luck, and remember I've got steam, if anything comes around the bend."

"Oh, there won't. We didn't leave anything floating up above that would be fit to follow us."

"Are you sure about that?" The Captain smiled grimly, adding as he turned away, "Well, perhaps not."

He had scarcely finished speaking when a vivid flash spurted from the darkness far up the left bank. Instantly the accompanying roar was caught up and multiplied by a hundred yelping echoes, as if from hounds waiting eagerly for the cry, and a swiftly circling star spun above the boats, dropped to the water just beyond them and flamed into a glowing caldron, from which the golden spray danced out like the petals of a flower. Its light had not yet died before a score of other flashes leaped along the edges of the woods on both banks, and the boats became the vortex of innumerable arching lines of fire, each of which terminated with a scream in a bursting shower of iron, which beat upon the plating of the tin-clads like resonant hammers, and crashed noisily through the light woodwork of the transports.

For a few moments the fleet endured this maddening bombardment in silence. Then slowly, one by one, the great navy guns began to reply. The boom of the first one resembled a lion's roar heard above the yapping of beagles, so much more majestic and terrible was it than the voices of the field-pieces which had goaded it into activity. But the zone which its projectile had to search was vast. A converging fire had to be met by a diverging. The fleet replied very slowly, and a disjointed yell of triumph rose through the night, spreading and scattering into the distance on either flank. The assailants needed no sight of the depleted ammunition-rooms to know how matters stood there.

The fire of the invisible field-batteries increased in volume. These batteries lay opposite to each other, and some distance above the boats, so that their lines of fire drew together at an acute angle upon the latter. Consequently the batteries stood in no danger of shooting into one another. They soon attained the range perfectly, and the battle became a contest of calibers; a question whether many small projectiles, striking the same spot incessantly, could accomplish annihilation sooner than a few massive missiles scattered over a wide area.

On board the *Sevastopol* was much commotion. This did not originate in panic, but in the multiplicity of duties which the slender crew was called upon to perform. Thirty-three souls, all told; the Captain and mate, two pilots, the engineer and two firemen, twenty-six deck-hands.

Of the latter, twelve were serving the guns. They were obliged to crawl out across the cotton-bales and lean over the water in order to sponge and ram. Six more were carrying ammunition and five formed a bucket-brigade, running hither and thither, dashing out the blazes which every moment sprang up in various parts of the ship from hot fragments of exploding shell.

The *Sevastopol* was a veritable tinder-box. Only continuous deluging kept her from bursting into flames. The three remaining men, who stood at the stern on the wheel-supporting beams, did nothing but dip water from the river for the fire-fighters.

Except for the occasional flare of lightning and the momentary illuminations of these incipient conflagrations, the vessel was in total darkness. One unfamiliar with its intricacies would have been obliged to grope his way with extended hands. Yet the the members of the crew rushed about on their various duties at a run. They were panting and sweating with exertion. All this turmoil, the shouts and curses, the roar of the guns, the scream and explosion of bombs, the crash of breaking timbers, the flitting shadows of men darting hither and thither, made a bewildering phantasm of sights and sounds. It was Hades without lights; a black pit of complex uproar.

In the meantime, as if Nature would draw a veil between this brutal strife and the peaceful heavens, the cloud bank in the north had gradually risen, blotting out the stars. Its lightnings had almost ceased, and it crept up slowly, as if preparing for a quiet, all-night's downpour of rain. Its coming, however, rendered the darkness all the more intense. Nothing remained visible save the flashes of guns.

One could not imagine that, in the midst of such thunderous turmoil, so small a sound as the muffled and distant plashing of water

Digitized by Google

would be noticed by anybody. Yet that sound arose, utterly inaudible to any ear save one, and that one heard it.

Captain Bull, smoking a cigar, stood at the bow of the vessel which was farthest up-stream, directing the firing of a cannon. Near his feet sat a gunner, Robert Donald, his nephew, whose left arm had just been blown off at the shoulder. With his right hand pressed against the gap, from which he was speedily bleeding to death, the young man rocked slowly to and fro, exclaiming at intervals:

"O, ——, if I could only a-lived till they come! O, ——, if I could only a-lived till they come!"

THE Captain paid no heed to him whatever, but suddenly he ceased his attentions to the gun and leaned forward, listening intently. His half-burnt cigar glowed steadily between his clenched teeth.

Then he stepped back to the saloon-deck stairs, behind which the mate was giving out ammunition.

"Jim!" he called.

A head appeared around the stairs.

"Well, father?"

"They're coming."

The mate stepped out and together they went to the side and peered into the darkness.

"I don't see anything," said the young man.

"Can't you *hear*?"

Again they listened. Suddenly the mate slapped his thigh.

"By Heaven, they are!" he exclaimed.

Behind them, the wounded man changed his litany:

"O ——, *let* me live till they come!"

Of the *Sevastopol's* complement only about twenty-three men now remained. On both banks the enemy's infantry had wormed their way to the water's edge and, though the sound of their muskets was quite lost in the overwhelming roar of the cannonade, their small bullets were doing more execution than the spherical shells. Only two of the transport's guns were being served. The crew had apparently grown discouraged. From the very vessel herself seemed to emanate a mood of sullenness, as if she had yielded to rebellious despair under overmastering odds.

But now a subtle change appeared to take place all at once. A spirit of exultation made its way with electric swiftness through the scattered crew, infusing them with new animation. The Captain and mate separated and, each taking one side of the boat, rapidly severed the drag-cables with their dirk-knives. Already the firemen were stoking the furnaces, the red glare from the open doors being hidden under gunny-sack awnings stretched across from the boiler-heads to the posts of the fuel-bunkers. One pilot was dead, pitched headlong in a heap among the débris of the texas deck. The other crouched behind the wheel, while the bullets sang through the windowless skeleton of the pilot-house over him.

The *Sevastopol* silently swung out from her consorts and crawled up the river. Apparently her departure was noticed by neither her friends nor the enemy. At all events, the cannonade continued with unabated fury.

War presents many faces, nearly all horrible; they differ only in degree. Fighting by daylight is bad enough; face to face with the foe, knowing that the best man will win. Fighting against an ambush is worse, although even there the eye may be depended upon to reveal some things. More disconcerting than either is a combat in the night at long range. But of them all, the worst, the most diabolical and terrifying, is the still-hunt in the dark; a contest of creeping and feeling and listening; a struggle of silence and patience and brute cunning. Then a man knows not when a soft breath may brush his face and a knife be left quivering in his bowels. Of this species of grisly combats were the Vendean insurrections largely made up; they lend a hideous fame to the Spanish invasions of the Netherlands and the internal convulsions of the Inquisition and they are always a prominent feature of barbarian warfare. Indeed, they are the quintessence of savagery; therefore, of war.

Upon such a struggle the *Sevastopol* was now entering. About the bow windlass and the two siege-guns flanking it crouched the slender remnants of the crew. In their hands they carried various sorts of weapons, muskets, sabers or rifles, but hardly one lacked a knife and a revolver thrust in his belt. The two cannon were heavily charged with grape-shot, primed and ready for instant use. With scarcely steam enough to make head against the current, the shattered

Digitized by Google

transport bore up the river. A progress of a few yards carried her beyond the circle of the enemy's most intense fire, though not beyond its protecting uproar. Meanwhile, conversation in guarded tones passed among the men.

"Is it sure the Fordice crowd?"

"That's what they say."

"Who?"

"Jake and Captain Bull."

"How does he know?"

"Instinct, I reckon. He can *smell* that gang, ten miles off."

"He'd ought to, poor cuss, after what they've done to him."

"And we've done to them!"

"Well, if it *is* the Fordices, we're dead dogs. They must be a hundred men."

"They won't be, when we get done with them."

"You're right there! Hush! What's Jake saying?"

A stern whisper passed over the group. "Silence, men! Remember, now, what you're here for. This is not to be a battle. *No quarter.* They'll give none. You hear?"

"Yes, yes!" The answer was a growl.

"When we touch, that instant you, Mart Donald, and you, Jeff Bull, throw lines and grapple fast. Understand?"

"Right, Captain."

"Gordon Donald, give them the grape as soon as you see the direction. You others, the second the guns have fired, up, yell and board them. Fight for your lives, hard and fast; it's our only chance. And, remember; we are all one family to-night and *so are they!*"

"Ay! We'll be with you, Jake!"

"That we will!"

"Quarter? No! Not for murderers!"

The low talk ceased. But silence yielded nothing to indicate the position of the enemy. The plashing of water ahead had stopped some time since. The opposing boat was evidently drifting down with the current. However, the river was narrow at this point. Behind bellowed the navy guns of the tin-clads and on either flank the roar of the field-batteries rolled up in ceaseless surges, wave on wave.

SUDDENLY, with no warning whatever, not even a preliminary grinding, the *Sevastopol's* bow came into violent collision with some ponderous obstruc ion. The concussion was too tremendous to have been occasioned by any stationary obstacle. Whatever she had met was evidently moving with some speed in the direction opposite to her own. The cotton-clad heeled over on her starboard side, while her whole fabric quivered and ground together, creaking and groaning.

She righted at once, but not before pandemonium had broken loose. She and the enemy's vessel had encountered one another bow to bow, and now became evident the fact that the best of battle plans may be neutralized by the dispositions of the foe.

The latter did not give back in confusion before the tempest of yells and curses which broke from the men of the *Sevastopol.* On the contrary, this was answered by one as fierce and of vastly greater volume. Gordon Donald hastily jerked the lanyards of the two siege-guns, whose blasts of grapeshot swept the deck and splintered the woodwork of the enemy's vessel, but injured them in little else, for the reason that they were all lying prone upon their faces in expectation of just such a greeting.

At almost the same instant, two guns were discharged by the enemy, which riddled Gordon Donald, bent the elevating-screw on one of his cannon and set several of the bales on fire. But the *Sevastopol's* men were likewise lying down, and so these two hurricanes of missiles, each designed to reap a harvest of death in the opposing ranks, flew for the most part harmlessly overhead, leaving neither side in worse plight than before.

The real combat now began. Its development showed a curious similarity in the plans of the opposing leaders. A throng of men rushed across the bow of the enemy's vessel, which was a cotton-clad steamboat similar to the *Sevastopol,* and descended in a shouting torrent upon the latter vessel. They were preceded by several leaders, whose voices could be heard above the general outcry, exhorting:

"Come on, Fordices; cut 'em down!"

"Remember our dead wives and children!"

"Throw them into the river! Kill them all!"

Captain Bull, wielding a massive cavalry saber, at the head of his closely packed followers, strove vainly to check the rush and to force the struggle back upon the enemy's deck.

Digitized by Google

"Follow me!" he roared. "Bulls, Donalds—stop them!" To the enemy: "Murderers! Back with you!"

In all the tempest of shouting which surged above this desperate encounter one strange fact was noticeable. Not a single voice was crying a phrase such as might be heard on an ordinary battlefield; not an appeal to patriotism or national pride; not an epithet against rebel or Yankee. Those great matters were swallowed up and forgotten in the gall of private animosity. Here, then, was presented the curious spectacle of a vendetta within a civil war; a whirlwind within a cyclone. Close at hand, the bellow of the main battle continued unabated. The Federal squadron was enveloped in thunders.

Out there were forces, fragments of greater, fused of individuals striving unselfishly, if blindly, to shape the destinies of nations. But here were men forgetting all higher impulses in the desire to tear each other's throats for personal hatred. It was a strange blossom of human passion, this; blown suddenly like a poisonous exotic in the dreadful flower-garden of war.

It very soon became evident to Captain Bull that he would be unable to accomplish his purpose of carrying the combat into the enemy's quarters. Though his men fought fiercely, they were overwhelmed by the numbers which seemed fairly to swarm upon his decks. He and his followers were forced gradually back across the open bow, losing first one and then the other of the siege guns until shortly they were clear behind the cotton bales.

Several of these, though soaked with water, were on fire, throwing a lurid, fitful glare into the faces of the fighters and exuding clouds of smoke which, together with the fumes of exploding gunpowder, choked and blinded both parties alike. Half of the *Sevastopol's* men and a score of the enemy were down, piled about the deck, where they were being kicked and ground by the combatants. The wounded crawled about unheeded. Sometimes, like animals, they fought together or slashed the legs of the erect. Robert Donald, the youth whose arm had been carried away before the beginning of this feudal collision, still alive though very weak, was worming his way along the edge of the *Sevastopol* toward its bow.

Now and then, he muttered to himself between efforts:

"Thank ——, I lived till they come!"

THE pilot, the engineer and the firemen of the *Sevastopol* had quit their posts and joined the fray. The two vessels, which had been lashed together by the enemy, without direction or momentum other than that furnished by the current, were drifting and swinging down the river, drawing nearer and nearer to the Federal gunboats and the deadly circle of artillery fire about them.

No one, however, appeared to notice these things. The minds of all were centered on their own agonies. That is, all except perhaps Robert Donald. But he was nearly dead.

Captain Bull himself had received a fearful sword-cut across the face, which compelled him to raise his arm every moment to wipe the accumulating blood from his eyes. He did not, however, cease fighting nor encouraging his followers for a moment, and he could see clearly enough to recognize at the first glance the man who presently laid hold of the upper-tier cotton bale behind which he himself stood, dragged it from its place, and presented a revolver in his face.

"Zeke Fordice," said the Captain, striking the revolver aside with his saber, "you murdered my wife. Here's to —— with you." And he lunged forward.

The other leaped back, avoiding the thrust, and again aimed.

"Jake Bull, you slaughtered my children. Swallow this for a pledge with the devil."

So saying, he fired and missed.

Bull, in the meantime, had cocked his own revolver, which he raised and discharged. His opponent tossed his hand to his breast, half wheeled and pitched over, while the Captain, with no word, turned to other matters.

Meantime the position of the *Sevastopol's* men had become desperate. Though, by gigantic efforts, their assailants had been diminished to one-half their original numbers, they themselves had suffered in like proportion. The fight had been carried back and scattered into the bowels of their vessel. Men in single and group combat were fighting among the fuel-bunkers, about the boilers and even alongside the great driving-shafts, far in the stern.

Digitized by Google

Here could be heard choking cries, sudden imprecations and ferocious pantings, while the reek of blood and sweat mingled with the smoke-fumes to form a nauseating atmosphere in which breathing was anguish. Now and then a shell swooped in and burst, lighting the infernal scene with a lurid glare, but otherwise everything was shrouded in appalling darkness, for the consuming cotton-bales were too far forward for their flickerings to penetrate this cavernous interior.

The two boats, lashed together as if in a death-grapple, were now yawing past the Federal tin-clads, so close as almost to collide with them. Shouts of astonishment and alarm could be heard from these vessels, whose crews, absorbed in their own conflict, had not until now noticed that the *Sevastopol* was absent from her proper position in their quadrangle. They evidently could not at first comprehend whether this mysterious, dark mass, floating without guidance, this drifting thunder-jar of confused noises, was an apparition or an enemy coming to complete their ruin. The boats of the feudists, however, bore past without giving any sign of their character, and now, a few hundred yards below them, with no obstacle between, lay the riffle of the rock shoal. It would have been curious to speculate upon what might become of them there. That some conclusion must be arrived at soon was obvious, and the total destruction of the *Sevastopol's* crew appeared the most probable.

HOWEVER, insignificant causes sometimes produce great effects. Faint from loss of blood, able to drag himself only a few inches at a time with his remaining arm, Robert Donald, persevering in some purpose known only to himself, had gradually crawled to the bow of the *Sevastopol* and thence, with infinite pains, across the rocking gap to that of the enemy. He found no one there. It was deserted. Every foe had passed over to join in the conflict. So he paused a moment to gather strength. Robert Donald himself had been happy, a year since, in the possession of a young wife whom he loved. He had returned to his home one morning from a voyage to find her dead in bed, a knife-wound in her heart. Hence his persistence.

Presently he gathered himself together and went on. Like a worm, he crept through a gap in the cotton-bale wall, a counterpart of that on the *Sevastopol*, thence past the foot of the saloon-deck stairs and on by the bunkers, the furnaces, and so finally to the engines.

All was deserted, all quiet. The sound of the conflict he had left was lost in the sound of the greater conflict beyond. He drew from his pocket a handful of matches, struck one and looked around. Near him stood a large engineer's oil-can with a long, tapering spout. He shook it and found it nearly full.

Taking this with him, he hitched over to the side of the boat and felt of the nearest cotton-bale.

He could not repress a cry of exultation. It was dry!

In order to be used effectively for barricades, these bundles of greasy fiber must be thoroughly soaked with water. Otherwise, they will burn like tinder. Unscrewing the top of the lubricating-can with his teeth, Donald poured a pool of the liquid on the deck, struck another match and lit it. The tiny flame shot out across the oil, licked a moment at the base of the nearest bale, then leaped to its top and, advancing with lightning strides, swept in either direction along the bulwarks.

Before Donald had regained the middle of the deck the whole port side of the vessel was enveloped in fire.

Intense excitement now gave him a momentary inrush of vitality. He rose to his feet, shouting, and set fire to the starboard bales in the same manner.

By this time the whole interior of the vessel was as vividly light as day. Donald sprang back amidships, where he had discovered the iron ring of a hatch-door. This he jerked off, revealing the shallow, flat-bottomed hold. Peering down, he uttered a yell of demoniac laughter and reeled off across the deck in a grotesque dance.

"Aha, you Fordices, I have you now! This is the end, murderers. No wonder you fought so hard to keep us off! But this is the end. Hell-hounds, here is revenge enough for us all!"

The hold was full of powder-kegs.

Doubtless they were supplies intended for the Confederate army. The keg immediately beneath the hatch had been broached, and now stood half full, with the cover off. As usual with unscrupulous men,

Digitized by Google

the feudists had neglected to fulfill their public obligations in their eagerness to gratify private passion. Neglect in this instance cost them dear.

A babel of cries and shots arising from the bow of the vessel, louder than the crackle of the flames, now attracted Donald's attention. This solitary incendiary, executing a barbaric dance of triumph in the midst of a furnace, this bloodless corpse, galvanized into a hideous activity by the power of insane emotion, rushed to one side, where the intense heat peeled his skin. He peered down the fiery aisle. At its farther end he could see his enemies, who, knowing what their ship contained, and terrified at discovering it in flames, had given way before the men of the *Sevastopol* and been driven back to the narrow front of their own vessel, where they were now huddled together like sheep, hemmed in by foes on one side and on the other by flames.

With the hair singed from his head, Donald stood and shook his one fist at his enemies, like a very fiend in the pit of Hades, shrieking:

"Come, come, Fordices! Scorpions, take me! Why don't you come? Are you afraid to breathe fire? You shouldn't be, devils. You'll soon have nothing else to breathe, forever. Ah, come, let me hug you; let me kiss you, butchers—you who have left me nothing else to kiss! Ah, when you struck at Robert Donald you struck too far. Here's to —— with all of you—all, all!"

He turned and, wrenching a huge handful of blazing cotton from beside him, ran over and jammed it down the throat of the hold into the half-keg of powder. Then he fell prone across the hatch.

WHEN the men on the Federal gunboats had recovered their feet, the cannonade had ceased. Absolute silence reigned on every side, painful to the ears after the terrific uproar to which they had been subjected. The Confederates, as well as the Federals, had discovered that a further attack on the squadron at that point would be useless. The pilot of the flag-ship turned to his chief.

"Commander, they blew up exactly on the reef of rocks."

"Yes."

"I am convinced the passage is clear,"

"You think so?"

For answer, the pilot turned to the speaking-tube connecting the pilothouse with the engine-room, and cried through it:

"Jim! Jim! Give all the steam she'll carry. Quick!"

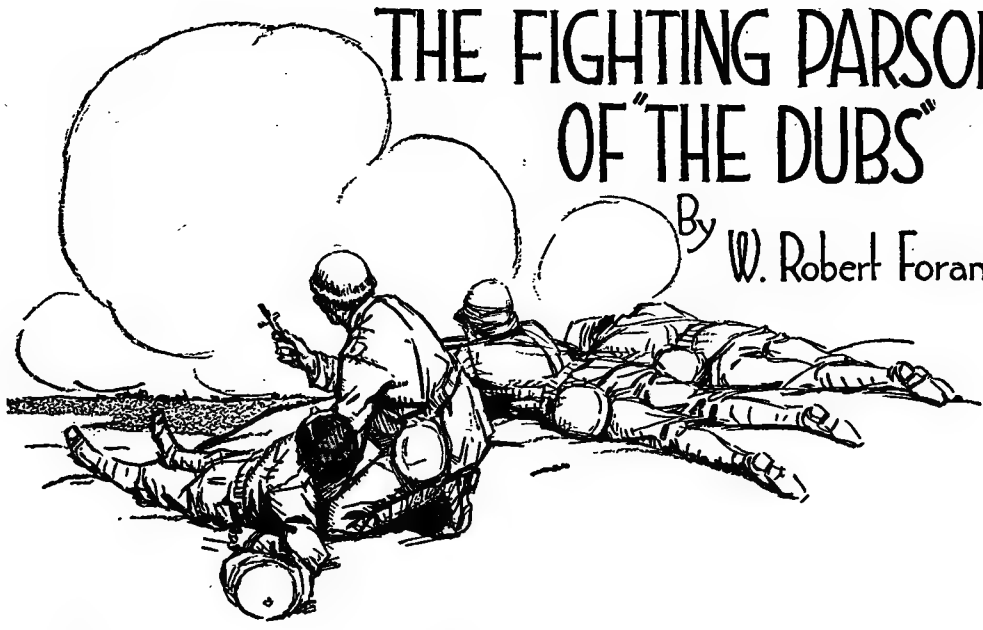
Then he again looked at his chief and said quietly:

"You may ship the hawsers, Commander, and order the squadron to get under way. I will take the flag-ship through."

Digitized by Google

THE FIGHTING PARSON OF "THE DUBS"

By W. Robert Foran



FATHER PATRICK MALONEY, Chaplain to Her Majesty's Land Forces, had earned his militant title of "The Fighting Parson of the Dubs'" in the campaign against the Zulus in 1879. It had not been lightly earned, as the scars on his body from Zulu spears amply proved.

Father Pat, as he was more familiarly known to the men of the famous Dublin Rifles, was a man of small stature, but his enormous girth of shoulders denoted a strength beyond the ordinary. His name was one to conjure with on the playing fields of Maynooth College, the Catholic Seminary in Ireland, where he had studied for the priesthood. The students of the college still speak in reverent accents of one Patrick Maloney, who had surpassed all records in throwing the hammer, weight-lifting and other like feats of strength.

On receiving his appointment as a Chaplain to the Army he had been posted to the Dublin Rifles, and he had fought with them in India, South Africa and Egypt. He was just as much a part of the soul and body of the gallant regiment as were their battle-scarred colors. He had grown up with the regiment, and he treasured their welfare next only to the God he served.

Tender-hearted as a woman, brave as a lion, Father Pat was the best beloved of priests. Officers and men took all their troubles to him. His great, big, sympathetic heart was overflowing with tender love for the weak as well as the strong. The long-service officers and men of the regiment, at the time of the campaign against the Mahdi, still spoke lovingly of his heroic deeds under fire, when he braved the bullets or spears to give absolution to a dying soldier on the field of battle.

They could never forget how Father Pat had stood beside them when the regiment faced the hordes of Dinizulu's warriors and fought with fists and clubbed rifle. They remembered seeing this stalwart little man, with flashing eyes, breathing forth strange Irishisms at the savages, as he defended with might and main the wounded. They remembered him standing erect, with spears piercing his side and leg, calling upon his comrades to have courage and beat off the overwhelming odds of the savages. Remembering all this, they raised Father Pat to a pedestal of honor in the regimental records, and endeavored to spare him pain and trouble to the best of their ability.

Now he was at war again, with the fanatical dervish followers of the newly risen prophet, the Mahdi, in the Sudan. His regiment had been sent on active service to Egypt, to do their share in reconquering the Sudan. After terrible sufferings, the

Digitized by Google

British Army of Occupation had finally reached Berber, on the borders of the Sudan.

The dervish army, in overwhelming odds, lay close at hand. The General had issued orders that on the morrow, two hours before daylight, the army should advance to the attack and give battle to the Mahdi's followers at Atbara. They had rested at Berber for two days, to recuperate their strength for the coming fight. They were excessively weary after their long march, fighting hard every day to gain a few miles across the sand-packed deserts.

In the officers' lines of the Dublin Rifles, Father Pat sat on his camp-cot listening to the sins of his flock, granting absolution and dealing out minor penances. All day long the officers and men of the regiment had been passing through his tent in one long, continuous stream, seeking to cleanse their souls before going forth to the battle of the morrow.

Father Pat was tired, and he showed the sorrow he was feeling at the thought that tomorrow night many of his beloved "Bhoys" would be pleading for forgiveness at a higher tribunal. His face was tanned to a red-brick color by many years of exposure to the sun and service in tropical climes. The strong sun and winds of the Sudan had parched his skin, and his lips were cracked. But in his eyes his indomitable soul—the soul of a great, loving man—looked forth upon his sinning fellows with pitying sorrow.

At last the stream of penitents came to an end and Father Pat rose from his seat. He fell wearily on his knees beside the cot and silently offered up a prayer to his Master for pity on his comrades.

The bugles of the regiment sent forth their appeal to the officers to come and eat at the marquee tent, which did duty as a mess. Father Pat heard it and brought his supplications to an end. The mess-call died away, only to be taken up by the bugles of another regiment, and still another, until the whole vast camp echoed with the summons.

FOR a moment Father Pat stood at the door of his tent, looking out upon the busy camp. The rising moon made the white canvas of the tents shimmer. The noisy bustle of the large encampment was music in the Chaplain's ears.

But his joy at the prospect of a fight was tempered with sorrow at the suffering which must ensue as a result of the engagement. There was no denying the fact that the dervishes were fearless fighters.

As he walked with head erect and a kindly smile for the men who sprang to attention and saluted him in passing, Father Pat returned all the greetings with a kindly "Good evenin', Bhoys." The tones in which he said the simple words showed that there was more than a casual greeting in the wish.

The boisterous young subalterns of the regiment seized the good-natured Chaplain as he entered the mess-tent and whirled him around in a gay waltz, which he was powerless to resist. Father Pat loved a romp as much as the youngest officer in Her Majesty's Forces. The rough play was brought abruptly to a close by the entrance of Colonel O'Donovan, the gray-haired veteran who commanded the regiment.

"Ah, stop it, ye young rascals, will ye?" asked Father Pat, with mock severity, as he drew himself away from their encircling arms and saluted his commanding officer. "These young divils 'll be the death o' me yet, Colonel dear."

Colonel O'Donovan laughed as he noted the grimace the Chaplain made at his tormentors.

"You're as bad as the worst of them, padre. When will you ever be serious?" he asked.

"Faith, an' it does one good to be a bhoy again sometimes, sorr!" Father Pat remarked, as he took his seat at the improvised mess-table on an upturned empty biscuit-box which served duty as a chair.

"I'm afraid I have some bad news for you, Father Pat," the Colonel announced gravely. "You'll be mad, I know. Read that."

He threw a copy of the "Orders of the Day" to the Chaplain, who perused it twice before speaking. Then he looked up at the Colonel in dismay.

"The Giniral won't be afther permittin' any Chaplains to go with the trroops tomorrow?" he asked in tones of deep disgust. "Then who's to help the bhoys, I'd like to know, unless it's their Chaplain?"

"The boys will be sad when they hear you aren't to be with them," Colonel O'Donovan remarked sympathetically. "The dervish army is well entrenched at Atbara and will

Digitized by Google

put up a stiff fight, from all accounts. I fear many of us will not see the light of another day."

"Faith, an' the Giniral can't interfere with the rights of Hivin in this worrld," Father Pat interrupted, with deep feeling. "'Tis beyant the powerrs of a Giniral to do that same. Me duty is with the bhoys, sorr. And with the bhoys I'll be, God give me strength. Besides, who's to absolve the dying, if the padre's not there? Answer me that now, Colonel dear."

"I know how you feel, Father. I have done my best for you, but the General is determined that no Chaplains shall accompany the force. Remember that you're a soldier, and must obey the orders of the General."

Father Pat held his peace. But they who looked at him, seeing the grim lines of determination about his mouth, smiled. They knew that the "Fighting Parson" allowed no man to meddle with his spiritual duties. He knew his duty as a soldier, none better, but he placed his duty to his God above all things temporal.

As the officers rose from the table to go to their tents to snatch a few hours' sleep before marching out to give battle to the enemy, Colonel O'Donovan joined Father Pat and linked his arm within his.

They walked over to Father Pat's tent without speaking. These two men had been friends for many years and there was a bond of sympathy between them, for they had grown old in the service of their country.

On reaching the Chaplain's tent Colonel O'Donovan held out his hand and gripped that of the priest in a warm clasp.

"Nothing rash, now, Father Pat," he said. "If you disobey the General's orders, it will only mean a court-martial, remember."

"Nevertheless, I'll be afther goin' with the regiment to-morrow." Father Pat spoke between clenched teeth, and he viciously snapped his jaws over the words. "The Giniral has yet to learn that he can't interfere twixt God and man. I'm a priest before a soldier, old friend."

Colonel O'Donovan shrugged his shoulders and smiled. He knew that it was no use arguing; and he admired and sympathized with the priest's spirit.

"Good night and—God bless you, Father," he said, as he turned on his heel and strode through the moonlight to his own tent.

Father Pat entered his tent and threw himself on his knees before his camp-cot and besought the help and guidance of a Higher Being.

Presently he rose. He gathered up his accouterments, slung a water-bottle and haversack over his shoulders, strapped a revolver and belt of cartridges about his waist and, so equipped, silently stole forth from his tent.

Picking his way carefully and seeking advantage of every bit of cover, Father Pat sped through the now silent camp toward the outposts.

With incredible cunning he safely eluded the sentries who were on duty around the zareba, and presently, with a sigh of relief, he gained the open desert beyond the chain of guards.

He marched swiftly across the desert in the direction the army would take on the morrow. Overhead the gorgeous star-decked heavens lit up the sandy waste with lustrous splendor. In the distance a jackal called, and was answered by the dismal wail of a prowling hyena. Behind him the tents of the camp showed, white and silent, and then slowly faded from view. The "Fighting Parson" was alone with his grim determination to be with the beloved flock in their time of need.

JUST before dawn the huge camp aroused and the bugles rang out the reveille. Before the sun had risen the army was on the march. They were eager to attack the dervishes and thus forge another iron link in the long chain which would one day hold the Sudan.

On the right, the British infantry brigade, comprising the Dublin Rifles and two other regiments, marched with their scouts well-placed to protect their front, rear and right flank. On the left, the Egyptian infantry brigade advanced in similar formation. In the distance could be seen the scouts of the cavalry, who were throwing out feelers to locate the enemy and give early warning of any counter attack. In the center marched two infantry brigades, one British and the other Egyptian, two batteries of horse artillery, a battery of Egyptian field artillery and three cavalry regiments, forming the main body and reserve of the attacking force. The General and his staff

Digitized by Google

rode a little in advance of the main body.

The absence of the beloved Chaplain had been noted by the men of the Dublins, and they swore strange, hearty oaths when they heard the cause of it. What right had the General to prevent their priest from accompanying them, they asked. And, receiving no answer, they swore anew. The remarks of the rank and file were not at all complimentary to the General; but the officers did not check them, pretending not to hear, for they were as angry as their men.

The army had been on the march across the desert for a couple of hours when a khaki-clad figure suddenly came to meet them from a dried-up donga ahead of them. With a roar of joyous welcome they recognized Father Pat. He had hidden himself in the donga behind a boulder, eluding the prying eyes of the scouts, until he had perceived his own regiment approaching. The "Fighting Parson" was an old hand at military tactics.

"The top of the mornin' to ye, Colonel dear," Father Pat remarked, as he smiled and saluted Colonel O'Donovan. "'Tis a fine mornin' for walkin'."

"Where on earth did you spring from, Father?" asked the bewildered Colonel.

He looked grave as he asked the question, for he realized that this gross disobedience of orders would only end in trouble for this best beloved of priests.

"I shall have to report you to the General, Father, and you know what that means."

"Shure an' I do that same, Colonel dear, but me duty is here with the rigiment. And it is here I'll be afther remainin'."

For a time neither spoke. The Colonel had turned his attention to the cavalry, who were maneuvering rapidly ahead. The priest dropped back to talk with the Adjutant and the other officers.

Presently a couple of troopers galloped back from the scouts and delivered a message to the General. The latter and his staff trotted forward to a small knoll which commanded a better view of the country.

A staff-officer detached himself from the General's party and galloped furiously to the right-flank brigade. He delivered his message and wheeled. He galloped across to the left-flank brigade and rapped out another order.

The right-brigade commander gave an order to his bugler and the call for officers was sounded. The regiments came abruptly to a halt and threw themselves on the sandy desert to rest, while they awaited fresh developments.

In a few minutes the bugle rang out again, and the brigade sprang to attention. In response to rapid orders from their Colonel the Dublin Rifles formed company in line and advanced at the double, to take up a position on a low-lying ridge to the right. The other two regiments continued their march behind them, acting in support.

As the Dublins reached the summit of the hill, they saw before them the trenches and immense zareba, or stockade, of the dervishes. The white-clad hordes of the enemy were advancing to the attack.

Slowly the Dublins crept down the hill toward the right flank of the enemy. The other two regiments of the brigade occupied the hill they had just vacated.

"A flanking movement to take the right-wing zareba of the enemy," remarked the Adjutant to Father Pat, as they marched side by side.

The priest nodded his head in reply. He was too engrossed in the movements of the two forces to speak.

Presently A Company rushed forward at a smart double and threw themselves in extended formation on the sand, within a thousand feet of the advancing enemy. The other companies doubled up one by one and took up their position in the line. Soon they were firing vicious volleys into the advancing hordes. Checked only for a moment or two, the dervishes came on swiftly. The Dublins advanced with a mad cheer. Three companies at a time were hurled toward the enemy, firing as they went. Still the dervishes came on.

From the center and left could be heard heavy rifle-fire. The enemy were being heavily engaged all along their front and flanks.

"There go the guns," the Colonel remarked to Father Pat, as the priest wriggled toward him.

"Faith an' it looks like business now," Father Pat smiled.

"The boys will make a good showing. We'll get our bellies full of fighting before the day's over, padre." The Colonel broke off to shout an abrupt command to the right-half-battalion commander.

The regiment continued their advance steadily, as if they were on a field-day. Men were beginning to fall now, and the Chap-

Digitized by Google

lain's services were repeatedly in demand. He knelt beside each wounded man and held his crucifix to their lips, before they were carried to the rear by the hospital stretcher-bearers.

They were now within two hundred yards of the advancing fanatics. The bugle sounded the regimental call, followed quickly by the "Charge.". With a roar of delight, the Irish soldiers sprang to their feet, fixed bayonets and charged.

The dervishes saw them coming and hesitated in their advance. They were being subjected to a terrific fire from the two supporting regiments; and here before them were eight hundred screaming demons in khaki, with flashing bayonets. For a moment they stood and then they turned. With their white robes flowing in their wake, the dervishes rushed to the protection of their thorn zareba.

The Dublins quickened their pace and reached the zareba on the heels of the demoralized dervishes. In the van were Colonel O'Donovan and the "Fighting Parson." The latter had picked up a dead officer's sword, and was excitedly waving on the men.

THE Colonel glanced quickly at the Chaplain's face and laughed. Then he had to attend to his own affairs, for he was engaged by four dervishes at once. He ran one through the body and shot another down with his revolver. The other two stabbed at him with their evil-looking spears and, try as he would, he could not reach them with his sword. His revolver had fallen useless from his left hand, as the result of a crushing blow from a dervish sword.

The beads of perspiration began to gather upon the Colonel's forehead and run down his face in small streams. He parried a vicious thrust of one of the dervish spears and, in doing so, his sword broke off short at the hilt. He drew himself erect and prepared to meet the inevitable rush with his right fist. He felt it was only a matter of minutes now.

Suddenly there was a shout, and one of his sergeants ran in front of him and received the rush of the two dervishes with his bayonet. He impaled one man, then was cut down the middle from head to waist by a sword-blow from another dervish who had joined in the unequal fight.

The brief respite had not found the Colonel idle. He had picked up a dead soldier's rifle and held it in his uninjured hand as a club. But the odds were overwhelming. He managed for a few moments to keep off his attackers; but, with a groan of hopeless despair, he saw that six other dervishes were running to the help of the two now engaging him.

But his time was not yet. Father Pat was at hand. With a mighty roar, the sturdy figure of the priest brushed past and took his stand in front of the Colonel. In his hands he carried a rifle with fixed bayonet, which he had picked up when his sword snapped in two pieces. His face was flushed and his eyes shone like two bright stars. He met the charge of the dervishes with a yell of fury. The Colonel stood beside him, and gave what little assistance he could.

"Keep a brave heart, Colonel dear," Father Pat shouted to him. "We'll beat off the divils, yet, God be praised."

Again and again the dervishes ran at them, only to be hurled back by the furious thrusts of the Chaplain's bayonet and the Colonel's swinging rifle-butt.

Then, with a rush, a young subaltern and a dozen soldiers came to their aid, having fought their way through the dervishes to the rescue of their Colonel. The fight was soon finished. Those of the dervishes who were not killed turned and bolted before the furious onslaught of the maddened Irishmen should overtake them.

The tension over, Colonel O'Donovan's strength failed him and he sank to the ground, weak with the loss of blood from four wounds.

Father Pat bent tenderly over his commanding officer and picked him up as if he had been a baby. Shifting the weight of the limp body to his shoulders, he began to carry it back to a position of safety in the rear of the fighting-line. The officer and men who had come to their rescue protected them from any further danger.

Placing his burden gently on the ground, Father Pat called a surgeon, and then rushed back to the fight. He had, for the moment, forgotten that he was a priest, and the Irishman's inborn love of a good fight was uppermost in his soul.

With a yell the irresistible Irishmen carried all before them, jumped the zareba wall and climbed out of the trenches behind

Digitized by Google

it. The dervishes had had enough, and fled, pursued by the angry volleys of the Dublins' rifles. Officers and men had noticed that the first man to mount the zareba wall and jump down into the midst of the dervishes was their beloved Chaplain, but now, when they had a space for breathing, they could not see him.

The adjutant called to some of the men to look among the fallen for the priest. His orders were interrupted by the priest's own merry voice, which came from outside the zareba.

"Here, bhoys, lend a hand with the Colonel." And over the top of the zareba appeared the figure of the Chaplain, carrying the limp form of Colonel O'Donovan. Glad hands helped him place his burden in safety.

This accomplished, the Chaplain again leaped the wall to attend to the wounded and dying. He was once more the priest, and all the fire of battle had gone out of his eyes.

The wounded were quickly brought into the trenches, and presently the Dublins were strengthened by the addition of one of the other regiments, which had hitherto remained in support.

SUDDENLY they were subjected to a heavy shell and rifle fire—from the left flank of their own force. This, with the dervish fusillade from their immediate front, soon began to work havoc among the two regiments.

A young Captain jumped up on the zareba wall and turned his field-glasses upon this new element of danger.

"By Gad! It's the Gypies, who've taken——" His words ended abruptly in a gurgle. He threw his hand to his head, toppled and then fell back dead in the trenches.

"Signaler! Flag-wag those —— fools to cease firing on us!" thundered an irate Major of the Dublins.

A signaler hastened to obey the order. But he too fell dead, shot through the heart. Another and another took his place, only to meet the same fate.

Things were looking serious. The trenches could not be held much longer under such a murderous fire. Men and officers were falling every minute, by the twenties. This cross-fire from the Egyptian brigade had to be stopped somehow—but how? The Major who had assumed command of the Dublins when the Colonel had been wounded looked in despair at the Colonel of the other regiment.

"Some one has got to go across and stop those fools," the latter announced, "but who will do it? You can't order a man to do a thing like that. It's almost certain death. Yet it has to be——"

"Lave it to me, Colonel. I'll be afther stoppin' the heathen spalpeens," the Chaplain's voice interrupted, as he jumped past them and started at a run toward the Egyptian brigade.

"Come back, padre! It's madness!" The Colonel started to follow him, but remembered that his duty lay with his command.

The only answer he received was a fresh death-dealing volley from the dervishes and Egyptian troops combined.

They watched the sturdy figure of Father Pat racing manfully across the bullet-and-shell-swept desert, toward the erring Egyptians on the left flank. Absolutely fearless, unmindful of the hail of bullets, this priest of iron nerve kept steadily on his way.

He covered half the distance and then, with a groan of horror, the Dublins saw him totter and fall to his knees. But he was up again in a few seconds and running forward, waving his arms at the Egyptian troops.

It seemed that the Egyptians would never cease firing. The Chaplain's efforts to attract attention failed dismally. His head began to swim from the exertion and loss of blood. A bullet had passed through his left side. The desert sand seemed to rise and then sink before him, like a stormy sea. His mouth was parched. Try as he would, he could utter no sound. He paused for a moment's rest and tried to call out to the Egyptian troops to cease fire. But, with a sob of utter hopelessness, he realized that he could not do it.

He struggled to his feet again and continued painfully on his way. Yard by yard he was getting nearer. He could almost see the faces at the trenches now. Surely they must see what he was trying to do! He halted, unable to struggle farther, and stood facing the trenches, with his arms held above his head.

Suddenly the Egyptian buglers sounded the "Cease fire." Thank God! he thought; they must have at last seen him and realized

Digitized by Google

his mission. His ears caught the sound of franctic cheering and over the trench walls of the zareba jumped two British officers, who ran hastily toward him.

Then Father Pat fainted. His comrades added their cheers to those of the Egyptians, as they saw the two officers pick Father Pat up and carry him back to safety. And then their attention was again turned to the dervishes.

The fire of the British batteries was creating terrible havoc among the dervishes, and presently they had had their fill. In a disordered, panic-stricken mass they turned and fled. The British and Egyptian cavalry, who had been in reserve, straining at their leash to charge, set spurs to their horses and galloped in pursuit. With flashing sabers and lance-points they raced across the desert, jumped the trenches of the dervishes and, in solid formation of squadrons in line, they swept through the dervishes, cutting them to pieces. The battle was soon over, and Atbara would henceforth go down in history as a famous British victory.

AFTER the wounded had been collected and brought into the field-hospitals, the pursuit of the flying enemy arranged for, and all the thousand and one other things which a general has to think of had been accomplished, the Commander-in-Chief rode across to the Dublin Rifles to thank them for their gallantry.

From their wounded Colonel he heard the story of Father Pat's defiance of his orders and subsequent heroic deeds. The General said never a word, but he grimly smiled once or twice.

Presently he rode across to the field-hospital and asked after Father Pat. He learned that his wound was not serious, but that he had lost such a quantity of blood that he was very weak.

The general dismounted and went into the hastily erected hospital-tent, where he saw Father Pat lying on a stretcher. He was comforting a wounded officer who had not long to live.

Father Pat smiled cheerfully at him.

"I've been afther refusin' this lad absolution," he remarked to the General, "bekase it's a terrible sin to be wishin' to die."

The General smiled grimly and looked down sternly at Father Pat. The Chaplain did not turn his eyes away. He knew he had done wrong, and was prepared to pay the price.

"Well, Father Maloney, so you chose to disobey my orders?" The General looked grave, for he was a noted disciplinarian. "What have you to say for yourself?"

"I could not be afther leavin' my bhoys, General," he answered seriously.

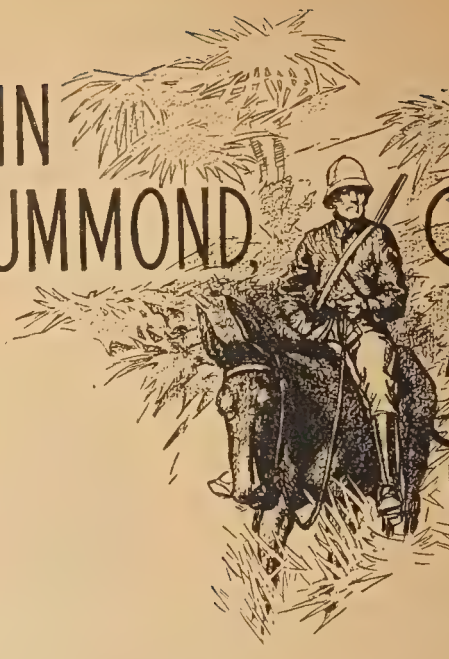
The General suddenly gripped the right hand of the padre in his.

"You're a man, Father Pat," he said kindly. "I would have recommended you for the Victoria Cross for your heroism to-day, if it had not been for your disobedience of my orders. As it is—" the General hesitated for a moment, and then continued sternly, "as it is, I'll waive the court-martial instead. Discipline must be upheld in the army."

"That's kind o' ye, Giniral." Father Pat lifted up the worn little crucifix which lay upon his breast. "This is the only cross I'll be wantin'. For what would I be wantin' another?"

Digitized by Google

JOHN DRUMMOND, GENTLEMAN ADVENTURER



By Henry Collins Walsh

TYPES are modified by their environment, and to suit the times. But they are eternal, and live by that perpetual adaptation to environment which Mr. Spencer tells us is the law of life. When we say "gentlemanly adventures," we immediately think of Raleigh and Morgan and Ponce de Leon, and such gentlemen of the old school, but they have their successors to-day, and will have till the love of adventure is dead in the human heart.

I have met several of these adventurers in the course of my personal wanderings. Here is one of them.

After many days of traveling on mule-back, through jungles and over mountains, in Spanish Honduras, I found myself at a little inn in Santa Barbara, a town situated in the interior. Here, one evening, I was indulging in a cigarette and after-dinner coffee with my land ord and his lady, when in upon this peaceful scene walked John Drummond.

I had heard of h m, and he was good enough to say that he had heard of me, and that he had come into Santa Barbara to take me out on his ranch, if I would accompany him.

I was obliged to refuse his invitation, but we remained together for that night and part of the next day, at Santa Barbara.

Aside from displaying himself in the altogether and showing me a body fairly perforated with bullet-holes, the visible reminiscences of many battles, he was reticent concerning his life and adventures, as such men usually are. What I record about him I have learned mainly through a friend of mine who has been much in Central America and who knows John Drummond well.

John Drummond, I have learned, was born in Mobile, Alabama, but just when I do not know, nor can I tell anything of his early days, and it suffices to say that he really became interesting when the spirit of adventure led him into the unsettled country of Honduras. Here he became a soldier of fortune, and rose to the position of commander-in-chief of the Army of Honduras under the former President Vasquez, whom he helped into power; for the presidency of Honduras is won not by votes but by bullets.

Vasquez remarked to my friend that John Drummond was always absolutely loyal to whatever cause he happened to be enlisted in.

At the end of his enlistment he would fight just as well and loyally under the flag of a former opponent.

Digitized by Google

THE MAD GRINGO'S NUDE ARMY

WELL, Vasquez had gone out of power and, like Mr. Roosevelt, was anxious for another term. In Honduras this is a matter not of conventions and elections but of uprisings. So Vasquez rose, and engaged Drummond to help him. Drummond was first sent to capture a quartelle, or small fort.

He stole upon it during the night and darkness. He armed his men only with daggers, and made them strip off every article of clothing. Nude, they stole into the quartelle, and immediately extinguished all lights. In the confusion and darkness, Drummond's men knew each other by the feel of the bare skin in the hand-to-hand combat that ensued, and in this way the garrison was quickly exterminated.

Drummond, with a small body of troops, then made a rapid march to the Atlantic coast and captured the principal port, Puerto Cortez. His force consisted of eight Texans and a few hundred native soldiers.

An army of Government troops were stationed at San Pedro, a town at the end of a line of forty miles of railroad which starts at Puerto Cortez and represents the entire railway system of Honduras.

One day it was reported to Drummond that the Government troops were on their way from San Pedro on a banana train. He immediately took possession of an engine and tender, placing the latter in front of the engine. Then he barricaded it, mounted a small piece of ordnance and his eight lusty Texans upon it, and so went serenely forth to meet the enemy.

As soon as the banana train hove in sight, he let fly at it with artillery and rifles, and stampeded the invading army, who took to the woods in terror.

Drummond and his men returned in triumph to Puerto Cortez. Then an alleged gunboat—nothing but a converted tug—was sent to attack Drummond by sea. Sunk partly in some ancient earthworks commanding the harbor was a very ancient piece of Spanish artillery, quite a large smooth-bore brass cannon, artistically ornamented after the old Spanish fashion. The ancient piece could not be swiveled because of the embrace of Mother Earth, but Drummond waited until the diminutive man-of-war was on a line with his piece of ordnance, then he bade his gunner to fire. As nothing happened, Drummond, who was smoking, leaned over and placed the lighted end of his cigar to the touch-hole. The cannon belched forth its missile, but it also rose in the air, struck Drummond in the face and knocked him senseless. He has been minus an eye since this exploit.

He was taken in a stretcher to the home of the British consul, where he lay for some days, "lost to life and use and name and fame."

Meantime, the invading Government forces entered the town. The eight Texans discreetly vanished, and Drummond's small army took to the tall timbers.

The Commanding General demanded Drummond from the British consul, who parleyed, having cabled to Jamiaca for a British man-of-war. So, while the parleying was going on, the Britisher appeared hot-footed from Kingston, the largest and most awe-inspiring instrument of naval warfare that had ever been seen in those waters.

It fired a saluting broadside, just to proclaim its deep-toned bass, and the General of the Government troops was invited on board. After the usual exchange of courtesies, the British Captain told the General that if anything happened to Drummond he would blow Puerto Cortez to an even hotter climate than it at present enjoys.

This casual remark, emphasized by a stern array of twelve-inch guns, produced a salient effect, and Drummond, who had partly recovered, was allowed to depart in peace, while the cruiser sailed off to its own waters.

But Drummond was captured as he was making his way to safety, and was incarcerated in a dismal prison cell in San Pedro. It was the intention to give him a trial for the sake of appearance, and then to shoot him. As a solace due to his rank and station, he was allowed a bottle of claret each night for his dinner.

One evening he sat in his dim and lonely cell awaiting his dinner, and perhaps also looking forward with anticipation to his bottle of claret.

One of the jailers entered bearing the bottle.

"Have a drink with me, señor," suggested Drummond.

"With pleasure, señor," responded the jailer.

Digitized by Google

There was but one glass, so Drummond took the bottle in his hand and filled the glass. Then he handed it to the jailer, who bowed and placed the glass to his lips. As he did so, Drummond hit him a fearful blow on the head with the almost full bottle, crushing in his skull. Seizing the soldier's musket, Drummond rushed forth and shot his other jailer dead.

MULE VS. DEATH

BY GOOD fortune, a mule, saddled and bridled, was tethered to a near-by tree. Mounting the mule, Drummond rode off into the darkness, and, you may be sure, kept the mule going at its highest mule-power. With the animal dead-beat, he crept into a village at daybreak, woke the alcalde from his slumbers and told him in excellent Spanish that the rascally Drummond had escaped, that he was in hot pursuit and that he wished a fresh mule at once, in the name of the *presidente*.

The mule was furnished, and again Drummond rode off at top speed. But his adventures were not yet over. He was captured by a squad of Government soldiers near the borderland of Guatemala, the haven of safety he was seeking.

After a brief court-martial, Drummond was sentenced to be shot at sunset. He was backed up close to a low wall, beyond which were jungle and thick woodland.

Ranking as a General in the insurgent forces, Drummond asked permission that he be allowed to give the word of command to the soldiers to fire.

The soldiers stood ready with guns leveled at the doomed man.

"Ready—fire!" called Drummond, and fell just before the flash. The volley passed over him, and the soldiers beheld the amazing spectacle of a man whom they thought shot to death suddenly arising and jumping over the low wall.

Once in the jungle and protected by darkness, Drummond made his way over the borderland and found safety in Guatemala.

And as the wheel of fortune and revolution has turned since this episode, he is now a respected citizen of Honduras, and has various mining interests to keep his fertile mind from stagnating.

KAVIRONDO TATTOOING

AN AFRICAN TRIBAL CUSTOM

THE women of the Kavirondo tribe, of Africa, tattoo the belly and sometimes mark the waists with tattoo marks. The men sometimes tattoo their bodies to denote the number of the enemy they have slain. For the first man slain, a series of lines of little scars are made on the right arm by thrusting a needle through the skin and snipping off the piece so raised.

For the second victim, a patch of similar scars is made on the shoulder, for the third on the chest, and so on. The left side is similarly decorated according to the number of women killed.

When the man's body is covered to the waist, his own decorations are considered complete, and he continues the record on the body of his wife. The patterns are not colored in any way. The skin is incised and then rubbed with an irritant which produces a thick scar. This method is known as scarification.——*W. Robert Foran.*

Digitized by Google

THE CRIMSON MASK

An Old-Fashioned Melodrama, with Some New Thrills.

By Jackson Gregory

CHAPTER I

A MYSTERIOUS WARNING

PHILIP DESMOND, sole grandson and nearest relative of Desmond, Earl of Villecourt, strode impatiently up and down through the great, somber drawing-room of Villecourt, awaiting the return of the servant, who had gone to announce his coming to the Earl.

The letter which he had received from the Earl a week ago was still incomprehensible to him. He had never had a word from his stern old grandfather before, had never expected to, never hoped to. The letter of yesterday, laconic, insistent upon his immediate presence at Villecourt Castle, had been incomprehensible in its turn, stinging his curiosity.

Now, to fume up and down through the gloomy hall, to wait as the long minutes dragged by, with no appearance of the Earl, no word from him, no return even of the majestic, gold-buttoned functionary who had gone to announce the coming of his Lordship's grandson—the young Desmond lost his temper and was of half a mind to pick up his stick and hat and walk the seven miles back to the little village inn.

Frowning out of one of the great, deep, mullioned windows through which the dimness of a fading summer twilight crept in across the straggling stone wall which shut in the castle, his eyes swept across the waving yellow corn-fields beyond, and the bosky meadow-lands and dark copses of birch and oak still farther away, and came to rest at last upon the little orchard of apple and pear trees within the crumbling walls.

His restless finger suddenly ceased its tapping upon the heavy pane of glass.

Two girls were coming out of the shadows of the orchard and drawing slowly near the gateway which gave entrance upon the box-bordered walk up which Desmond had ridden a few minutes ago. They were talking earnestly, confidentially, their voices discreetly low-toned. His eye followed gratefully the only living, moving things to be

Digitized by Google

seen in the funereal stillness of the antique picture before him, which Time had in some unaccountable way forgotten and let linger on down to to-day from the "spacious times of great Elizabeth."

There were three good reasons for Desmond's sudden ceasing to tap upon the pane, for his ceasing to frown, for his forgetting that he had been kept waiting for twenty minutes The only moving objects in such a lifeless setting, the girls caught his attention. Both pretty, they held his attention, and earnest, interested, absorbed as they were in their conversation, they riveted his interest. He wondered vaguely what they were talking of, so seriously, so eagerly.

Still talking, head to head, they came to the broad staircase just under the window. The taller of the two, a slender, dark-haired young woman, her face unusually fair and seeming fairer because of the ebon blackness of her hair and eyes, ran up the steps, slightly in advance of her companion, and paused there. He could see her bright eyes go the way his had gone, down the slope of the castle-crowned hill, out across the yellow fields and the tangle of forestland, with the bright little river rollicking through it all.

When she spoke, her words came to him in faint distinctness.

"It is so very beautiful, Evelyn!" she cried softly. "So wonderfully beautiful! Do you know that all of this——"

Her voice trailed off into a sigh, leaving her sentence unfinished. Evelyn the smaller, daintier, prettier of the two, Desmond thought, laughed merrily.

"I know, I know, my dear," she replied, dropping a mock courtesy. "You are a very fortunate girl, *My Lady Rosalind!*"

DESMOND started. So the tall girl with the black hair and eyes was Lady Rosalind! And the other some friend, companion, perhaps. Swiftly he decided to step out to the stairway and make himself known to this girl, who also had been summoned by the Earl.

The Lady Rosalind was a great grandniece, or something of the sort, to the old Earl of Villecourt, and Desmond felt that he himself could claim kin with her.

"If you will come this way, sir?"

Desmond wheeled to confront the gold-buttoned butler, who had gone to announce his coming. With a lingering glance over his shoulder, he turned and followed the servant.

"I will show you to your rooms, sir," the man said, as they came to a broad staircase.

"The Earl?" queried Desmond. "Am I to see him now?"

"The Earl asks that you will excuse him to-night," replied the butler, in his grave, deep voice. "He is not feeling well and will see you in the morning."

Desmond grunted, by way of answer, and followed up the stairs.

The long flight led to a hallway, dimly lighted and echoing to their footsteps. Here and there, from the wall, some neglected ancestor of the Earl looked down upon this last scion of the race; the ruffles and court dresses and drawn swords and flaunting plumes dust-covered, the faces unreal and ghostly in the faint light. Then came a second stairway, narrower and steeper than the other, and again a long hallway, dimmer than the first, with closed doors on each side, looking bleak and cheerless and inhospitable, and a small circular window, at the far end of the hallway, with the evening star peeping through it. At last the butler stopped at the door, under which Desmond's eyes caught a glint of light. Throwing the door open with a flourish, and stepping back so that the young man could enter, the butler said,

"Your rooms, Mr. Desmond, sir. Will you see if everything is here?"

Desmond entered and looked about him, with a rising interest. The room was large —it seemed even vast to him—but the most cheerful chamber he had seen in the castle. There was a large fireplace, with a bright log-fire crackling merrily. There was a table, a divan, three big leather chairs, a bookcase well stocked with novels and magazines, even a vase of fragrant roses upon the table. Through a door at the far side of the room, he caught a glimpse of a smaller room, with an old-fashioned, curtain-screened bed. There, too, he saw his own suit-case, looking, he thought, a bit out of place in the medieval atmosphere of the apartment.

"Your sitting-room, Mr. Desmond, sir. The bedroom there. The bath beyond. Is there anything, sir?"

Desmond flung himself into the yawning chair at the fireside.

"I think not," he answered, his eyes upon

Digitized by Google

the dancing flames "What time shall I see his Lordship?"

"At nine in the morning, sir. He has breakfast then. I will call you in time. Have you dined, sir?"

"Yes. I ate at the inn in Chittendale."

"Then there is nothing, sir?"

"No. Yes, there is. When did Lady Rosalind arrive?"

The man raised his eyebrows.

"You know the Lady Rosalind?" he said quickly.

"No, I don't. But I saw her and another young lady coming in from the orchard. Has she been here long?"

"No, sir. Just came a few moments before yourself. With her friend, Miss Evelyn Stanton."

"She has seen the Earl?"

"Not yet, sir. She will breakfast with you gentlemen in the morning."

Desmond looked at his watch. It was but little after seven o'clock.

"You may tell her," he said, turning his eyes again to the glowing fire, "that Mr. Philip Desmond would esteem it an honor if she would allow him to pay his respects to a kinswoman, if she is not engaged this evening."

"I am sorry, sir," the man apologized. "She ordered horses not half an hour ago. She and her friend are going to ride across the fields, to see an old lady who was a nurse of the Lady Rosalind's mother. Shall I——"

"Never mind," answered Philip lightly. "I shall see her in the morning. That is all."

"Yes, sir. And if you want anything, you will ring? If you want me ask for Jessup, sir."

"All right, Jessup. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

The door closed softly behind him, and Desmond sat alone, dreaming over the coals, which had rolled to the hearthstone. He mused over this strange summons from his grandfather, and speculated as to the outcome of the interview set for the next morning. One day, he knew, he would become Earl of Villecourt, but he had thought little enough of it, since his grandfather, although seventy years old, was as hale and hearty as a man of forty. And besides, the mere coming into the title would mean little to him, as the estate was not entailed, and the Earl could leave it to an orphanage or a society for the betterment of Hottentotdom, if he saw fit. He knew that his grandfather had quarreled with Robert Desmond, only son of the Earl, and Philip Desmond's father, and that the two of them had never once spoken for twenty years.

But the letters of yesterday and of a week ago! They more than hinted at a softening of heart on the part of the bitter old Earl. He wanted to see his grandson—he wanted him to come immediately to Villecourt Castle and to make his home there! He had written also to the Lady Rosalind, and hoped that she too would come.

There had been a postscript to the second letter. Desmond remembered it, word for word, and a puzzled frown gathered his brows as he pondered it over. Thus had the postscript run:

> Bring with you the silver-hilted dagger which your father gave you just before he died.

"Now how the devil does the Earl know anything about that dagger?" worried Desmond. "And what does he want me to bring it for?"

He got to his feet, and stood with his back to the fire. So standing, his eyes fell upon a painting upon the opposite wall, which he had not seen upon his entrance, and which first startled and then fascinated him.

It was full-length, reaching to the floor. As he first saw it, in the flickering light of the fire and of the tall, old-fashioned candles upon his table, he started, thinking that some one had slipped quietly into the room behind his back. And small wonder that his fancy tricked him, for the second. Life-sized, lifelike, it seemed, as the light danced across it, to breathe, almost to move.

It was the picture of a young girl, for all the disguise of a page's suit of the fifteenth century. She had masqueraded charmingly as a boy, but, after all, Mother Nature knew too well what she was about for that maiden to find it possible to conceal her sex. The costume was of pure white, from dainty slippers to trunks and full blouse. A jaunty cap, with a rakish feather, also white, was set upon the clustering, fair curls. And the face?

The face was hidden, all save an adorable little chin and white brow, by a crimson mask!

A log in the fireplace rolled noisily out

Digitized by Google

upon the hearth and clattered upon the floor. Desmond turned, pushed it back into place with his foot, and again turned to the painting.

With a stifled exclamation of amazement, he flung out his hand, as if to ward off a specter.

The picture had stepped from its frame and was walking toward him!

HE SAW it take three deliberate steps toward him, and pause, a gloved hand raised until a finger lay warningly upon its masked lips. Surely, he had gone mad!

He started back, a sudden chill, an uncontrollable shiver, running over his body. As he moved, he saw that there, behind the moving figure, was the picture he had seen a moment ago, still at its place upon the wall. And before him, living, moving, breathing, warning him, was the exact duplicate of the picture grown into flesh and blood! The same white satin page's costume, the same failure to disguise femininity, the same cap and rakish white feather, *the same crimson mask!*

Again a sharp exclamation of surprise broke from him.

"Sh!"

Only a whisper, but imperative, forcing silence. And as he tried vainly to assure himself that he was dreaming, that he had fallen asleep over his fire in a medieval castle, and that medieval visions were tricking his brain, the same whisper, low, distinct, insistent, assured him that he was wide awake.

"Philip Desmond, unless you are very watchful, you will be a dead man before dawn."

His laugh, sounding shaky and forced and false in his own ears, died under the uplifted, warning hand.

"You will laugh away your life!" The whispered words were emphatic, sibilant. "If you are wise, you will listen. Did you bring the silver-hilted dagger?"

Filled with wonder, Philip Desmond nodded in silence.

"Have you it with you?"

He shook his head.

"It is in my suit-case—in there."

He pointed to the open door of his bedroom.

"Make sure. Keep it upon your person. Get it now."

A moment he paused in uncertainty. Then, his heart beating normally again, his mind active, he stepped swiftly to the door by which he had entered this room with Jessup, locked it, slipped the key into his pocket, then crossed to the bedroom.

For a moment only he lost sight of the figure in white satin, as he ran his fingers through the things in his grip. With the dagger in his hand, he stepped quickly back into the fire-lit sitting-room.

From the wall, the lifelike picture looked across at him. At its feet lay a piece of white paper. The room was empty. The page with the crimson mask was gone!

CHAPTER II

THE PHANTOM OF THE TOWER

HALF persuaded that his brain had in reality tricked him, tempted to believe that the figure in the crimson mask, which had appeared from nowhere, gone into nothingness in a flash, was only a creation of a distempered imagination, Desmond stood staring about the empty room, the little silver-hilted dagger clutched tightly in his hand. His eyes went from one door to the other. He had locked one, and had been standing near the one leading to his bedroom. Surely, he must have dreamed a dream in a haunted castle.

But, as he tried to assure himself that the vision had come only to his sleep-bound senses, his roving eye paused at the bit of paper lying at the foot of the picture. Here was something real, something tangible. He picked it up and unfolded it with eager fingers. A glance served to acquaint him with the contents of the brief note, plainly written in a woman's hand:

> Keep the dagger always in your possession. Extinguish your candles, leaving a fire in the fireplace. Press the buckle on the left shoe of the page in the crimson mask. Watch your rooms until morning. You are in very grave danger.
>
> THE CRIMSON MASK

"What does it mean?" muttered Desmond, scowling at the lines which hinted at so much and explained so little. "And what is all this talk about a silver-hilted dagger? How does she, whoever she is, know anything about it? And am I to take this fantastic stuff seriously? Or is it some hoax, some senile jest of a doddering old

Digitized by Google

Earl? Is he spying through some convenient keyhole to see how his grandson disports himself?"

Irresolute, swayed this way and that by a dozen conflicting thoughts, Desmond stood gazing moodily at the note, which he held in one hand, and then at the dagger, which he still clutched in the other. Suddenly, with a short laugh, he made up his mind. Stepping quickly to the table, he extinguished the two tall candles. Throwing a heavy log upon his fire, he once more gave his attention to the painting which had so startled him, and which now seemed more a living thing than before, tremulous under the flickering light of the fire. Stooping, he placed his finger firmly upon the silver buckle of the left shoe, and pressed gently.

The whole picture swung noiselessly out toward him, disclosing a narrow doorway with a dimly lighted passageway behind it. Desmond stepped into the opening. As he did so, he heard the faintest click behind him and, turning, found that the picture had swung back into place. Still there was a faint light in the narrow hallway, barely enough light to show him that the walls on either side and the low ceiling were of rough-hewn stone.

Stepping softly, he walked down the tunnel-like hall. Ten steps brought him to a candle, hidden in a niche cut in the wall. Taking it up as he passed, he went ten steps farther on, to a little door opening in the rock wall to his left. The door was slightly ajar. A dim light, like the coming of dawn, shone forth.

He found himself in a long, narrow room, extending back toward the chambers he had just quitted. The walls were bare and of rough stone like those of the passageway. There was no furniture, beyond a straight-backed chair and a small, square table, upon which a candle was sputtering. The floor was of bare stone, like the walls. On the table was a piece of paper ostentatiously held by the heavy brass candlestick.

Desmond stepped promptly up to it, and was not surprised to see that the few lines on the paper were in the same unmistakable hand as those he had found in his own room.

> Close the door. Keep very still and watch. About five feet from the floor, at the west end of this room, you will find a small hole through which you can see what goes on in your rooms.
>
> THE CRIMSON MASK.

"And who is the Crimson Mask?" he asked himself again.

He examined the room carefully, even holding his candle close to the walls. There was no sign of any door save the one by which he had entered. Then he put out his candle and strode to the end of the room, whence he was to look through some sort of a hole into his own rooms.

There in the wall—he had no trouble in finding it—was a perforation. It was funnel-shaped, the narrow mouth of the orifice no larger than a pin-head, the part of the opening toward him no less than two inches in diameter. Putting his eye to the aperture, he was able to command the bedroom which had been assigned to him, the bed in it and—through the door opening into the room where he had left the fire burning—a corner of that room.

Returning his attention to the little vault-like room in which he now was, Desmond again sought to find some door leading into another hallway or room, but, after fifteen minutes of vain search, he gave up and, dropping into the solitary chair, lighted a cigarette and pondered the situation. Although he was half decided that the whole adventure of the evening was in the nature of some practical joke on the part of his aged grandparent, still, he grew determined to see the thing through, as the masked figure had suggested.

The evening dragged slowly for him. He smoked many cigarettes, arose now and then to look through the hole in the wall, dozed repeatedly—and finally came to himself with a start.

A hand had been laid upon his shoulder, and he sprang up to confront the figure in the Crimson Mask. Again he saw a gloved hand go swiftly to lips hidden under the silken covering.

"Don't speak!" came the whispered command. "You must ask no questions now. Just watch. See what is going on in your rooms."

HE STARTED to raise a swift objection. Not without a natural curiosity, he was on the point of asking who she was who took this interest in him and who knew so much of his affairs; why she appeared as she did, and whence she came so suddenly. But her commanding gesture stopped him.

Her satin-slippered foot tapping the

Digitized by Google

floor impatiently, she shook her head at him.

"No, not now," she repeated. "Watch. Quick, before they are gone."

He turned from her, vowing to know all about her before long and, stepping to the funnel-shaped hole, put his eye to it. As he did so, the clock in the castle-tower began to strike. Automatically, he counted the strokes. Eleven. He had not thought it was so late.

His glance, roving over the dimly fire-lit rooms, showed him nothing but the dark furniture and the flickering shadows of the dying fire.

As he was about to turn to the masked figure behind him, he was suddenly electrified, his nerves shocked into a sympathetic half-terror, by a shrill scream that arose somewhere beyond his own rooms, he thought, and went echoing throbbingly, strident with agonized fear, through the empty chambers. The cry died away as suddenly as it had broken into the stillness of the night, as though a hand had been slapped across the mouth of one struggling for life.

Silence a moment, and again the same voice, a woman's voice, lifted into a shriek of heart-clutching terror. Again the sudden silence.

Desmond whirled upon the figure behind him.

"What is it?" he cried hoarsely.

She was trembling, her clenched hands pressed to her breast.

"I don't know," she answered, her voice shaking as his own had been. "Murder, perhaps!"

"But you!" he cried insistently. "Who are you? Why all this mystery? Why all ——"

"You have little time to waste," she replied quickly, her voice again steady. "Watch your own rooms."

There was something in her tone which made him obey without argument. Now, as he applied his eye to the opening, he started to see two forms, men's forms, indistinct in the dim light, hasten noiselessly across the larger room, enter the bedroom and run to the bed in which Desmond was supposed to be asleep. In another second the two men had thrown themselves upon the bed, and Desmond caught the flash of steel in the hand of the foremost—steel which was lifted aloft and buried in the bedcovers!

Then there came to his ears a snarling cry of mingled consternation and anger, as the man found that the bed was empty.

DAZED by what he had heard and seen, his heart pounding wildly at his ribs, Desmond, pressed tight against the wall, watched the strange happenings in a sort of fascination. He saw the two men draw back and confer in rapid whispers. Then he saw them search the room, feverishly, looking under the bed, behind dressers, even under tables. For a moment they disappeared into the larger room, then returned and darted into the bathroom. At last, standing together by the empty bed, one of them opened and flashed about the room a dark lantern. One of the men he had never seen before. The other was Jessup, the butler!

With a sudden desire to overhear what they might be saying, Desmond turned his head so that his ear, instead of his eye, was at the funnel-shaped peep-hole. The tones, though low, were plain.

It was Jessup speaking.

"What does it mean?" he was saying, his voice betraying the same agitation Desmond had seen in the drawn face. "The door is locked, the key is on this side! Where did he go?"

"Don't you know? Can't you guess, Jessup?"

The other man's voice, even more agitated, trembled and seemed to come from between dry lips.

"Know? How can I guess?" Jessup retorted a bit angrily. "What do you know?"

Desmond heard the man draw nearer Jessup.

"You have been here only a couple of days," he said, his voice sinking so that Desmond could hardly catch the words. "I have been here fifteen years. And I know that this tower is haunted!"

Jessup laughed shortly, a growling sort of laugh with little mirth in it.

"Laugh, —— it," snapped the other. "But I know. No such thing as ghosts? Then where did Desmond go? And what warned him and took him out of this, tonight, of all nights? There is one ghost, even if there ain't any more!"

"The regular, white-sheeted apparition, I suppose," sneered Jessup.

"No! A woman, dressed like a page, in

Digitized by Google

white satin, in a red mask! She's haunted the tower for a hundred years."

Desmond wheeled to where the masked figure had stood a moment before. There was no one there. The room was empty!

As before there had been a note to assure him that he had not been dreaming, so now upon the little table lay a loaded revolver, glinting in the light of the guttering candle.

"Spirit or no spirit," he muttered to himself, "she has at least saved my life tonight!"

CHAPTER III

THE EARL OF VILLECOURT

UNTIL seven o'clock Desmond dozed in the little rock-hewn chamber. Then he regained his own bedroom noiselessly, undressed and went to bed. Again he dozed fitfully, his hand thrust under his pillow and resting upon the grip of the revolver.

A gentle tap at the door was enough to wake him.

"Who is it?" he called.

"It's me, sir," replied Jessup's deep voice. "Jessup, sir."

"Oh," replied Desmond sinking back upon his pillows and securing a firmer hold of his revolver. "Come in."

Jessup fumbled with the knob for a moment.

"It's locked, sir," he said.

Desmond grunted, thinking how little difference the lock had made a few hours earlier. Springing out of bed and throwing on a dressing-gown so that he might have a ready pocket into which to drop the gun, he went to the door and opened it. Jessup, suave and smiling, a pitcher of hot water in his hand, bowed deeply.

"I hope you slept well, Mr. Desmond, sir," he said politely, as he followed Desmond back into the room.

"Oh, yes," answered the young man lightly. "Well enough, considering that I slept in a strange room. How's his Lordship this morning?"

"Quite well, sir," responded Jessup, putting the pitcher upon the dresser in the bedroom, and returning to make a fire in the fireplace. "He expects you to breakfast with him, sir."

Desmond lighted a cigarette and walked up and down, stretching languidly, and always keeping an eye upon the man squatting over the fireplace.

In silence, Jessup finished his task and then rose to go. Having asked if there was anything Mr. Desmond wanted, and being answered in the negative, he had gone to the door, where he stopped, as though he had forgotten something.

"Matson, the gardener, sir," he began apologetically, "reports having seen a strange man wandering about the grounds late last night. Before we investigate, will you tell us if you chanced to be out taking a stroll late last night, sir?"

Desmond kept the smile of understanding back from his lips, and answered glibly,

"Not very late. I couldn't get to sleep early, so I did take a little walk out through the orchard. It must have been about half past eleven when I got back. Do you suppose he saw me?"

Jessup gave vent to a sigh of relief.

"I have no doubt of it, sir," he said promptly. "It was about that time that Matson saw a man, and he says the man was walking toward the orchard. I'll tell him that it was you, sir."

As Desmond made no reply, Jessup closed the door softly and was gone.

Twenty minutes later, having dressed leisurely, and stowed his revolver away in his right coat-pocket, Desmond went down the long flights of stairs to the ground floor of the castle. While seeming to be merely interested in the antique bits of furniture and the lines of dust-covered portraits upon the walls, in reality he kept a very close watch about him, prepared for an attack from any door he passed, ready to spring aside at each turning of the hall or of the winding stairs.

At the foot of the last flight, he found Jessup waiting for him.

"This way, sir. His Lordship is waiting."

Curious as to what his reception was going to be, Desmond followed the butler through two great, gloomy, half-empty rooms, and came suddenly upon a little summery breakfast-room where the sun shone in through wide-opened windows, where roses rioted about the sills, to which there came the merry song of a lark from the orchard. At the table, steaming dishes set before him, sat an old man.

"Mr. Philip Desmond, your Lordship!" cried Jessup.

Digitized by Google

The old man looked up and inclined his head gravely. Desmond saw before him a face which seemed to him, in some strange way, to be stern and kindly at the same time. Hair, curled mustaches and square beard were snow-white. The eyes were the Villecourt dark brown, almost black, large and expressive. The lips under the curled mustaches were pressed tightly together. There was a slight frown upon the high, white forehead as the dark eyes sought out the new heir.

"So, Philip," a low-toned, musical voice was saying, not unkindly, "you have come. I am glad to see you, my boy."

Desmond felt that the hand which he took into his own in a hearty grip of greeting, while being soft and smooth, was as firm as rock.

"I am glad to see you, your Lordship," he said warmly; "glad to see you looking so well."

The old man laughed, as he resumed his seat and motioned Desmond to a chair at his right hand.

"Only seventy years old, my boy! That's young for a devil of a Desmond, as the saying goes. Jessup, the coffee."

The coffee came, and Jessup withdrew.

"I AM glad you came so promptly," went on the old man, when he had subjected Desmond to a second keen survey. "You are your father over again. Well, well, we must not quarrel. You will be the Earl of Villecourt yourself, one of these days—if you live long enough," he added, his eyes twinkling. "For I'm good for at least twenty years yet! I swear I won't die to please anybody, before twenty years."

"I hope not," Desmond laughed lightly. "I assure you, your Lordship, that I'm going to live to be ninety myself!"

They laughed together, and Desmond felt that they were going to be friends.

"But how about debts?" queried the Earl, shrewdly. "I have never heard that there was any fortune left to you by either parent. And you must have lived the Desmond way—which means debts."

Desmond shrugged his shoulders.

"A very few. Not troublesome. To tell the truth, I have had so little time to spend that I am afraid my debts are going to disappoint you."

"Well, well, we'll attend to that after breakfast. And I have a commission——"

Jessup swung the door open.

"The Lady Rosalind!" he announced.

With the youthful agility of twenty-one, the old man sprang to his feet, to bow over the hands which were impetuously thrust out to him. Desmond, getting to his own feet, started, and an involuntary exclamation broke from his lips as he saw and recognized the lady whom Jessup had announced as the Lady Rosalind.

It was the girl he had seen standing at the foot of the front stairway the evening before, the smaller, daintier, prettier of the two girls, the one who had called her companion the Lady Rosalind, and who had been called Evelyn!

The Earl kissed both of the little white hands.

"I am very, very glad to see you, my dear," he said gently. "You are very good to come so quickly when an old man wants to see you."

Turning, the girl's hand still in his own, he addressed Desmond:

"Philip, come here. Lady Rosalind, this is Mr. Philip Desmond, my grandson, and a distant relative of yours."

With his astonishment plain upon his face, Desmond was about to ask the question which sprang unbidden to his lips. The Earl was facing him for a moment, his back to the girl. Desmond's eyes, intent upon her face, saw a light of understanding leap into her own eyes. And her swiftly changing expression, as plain as words could have done, pleaded with him for silence. A moment he paused, and then, before he could speak, the girl had given him her disengaged hand.

"I am very glad to know you, Philip," she said gently. "I must call you Philip, mustn't I? For we are almost cousins, aren't we, your Lordship?"

The moment for speaking had passed. Desmond took the proffered hand, bowed over it, murmured his pleasure and decided to wait for an explanation. It was just one more seemingly inexplicable thing to be explained. But that this was not the Lady Rosalind he had seen the evening before, he was absolutely positive.

The three reseated themselves, and the breakfast-hour passed brightly, without the Earl's seeming to notice any constraint on the part of Desmond. As they were finishing, Jessup entered to inform

Digitized by Google

his Lordship that the morning mail had come.

Excusing himself and telling the young people to expect him in the library in half an hour, the old man left them, to follow the butler. Desmond and the girl, arising with him, went together to the library. In the embrasure of one of the deep, dim, mullioned windows, Desmond abruptly put the question which had been upon his lips since Jessup had announced her.

"I trust you will forgive me if I am mistaken," he said, keeping his eyes upon her face, which, he thought, paled a little. "But I find there are many things about Villecourt which I fail to understand. And I thought that I had seen the Lady Rosalind—and that she was taller and darker than you!"

"Listen to me," she answered swiftly, fervidly, even anxiously. "There are things which I don't understand, either. Would to God that I did! I am not the Lady Rosalind. You are right. But do not condemn me as an impostor until you know all I can tell you."

Desmond nodded gravely, and waited for her to go on. Patently nervous, turning quickly now and then to see that they were not being overheard, she spoke with passionate eagerness.

"I AM Evelyn Stanton, Lady Rosalind's best friend. Lady Rosalind has had two very urgent letters from her kinsman, the Earl. He intimated very plainly that if she acceded to his request and came immediately to Villecourt, he intended to bestow upon her, as one of his heirs, the famous Villecourt diamonds. Of course you know of them. They are said to be fabulously beautiful, worth a king's ransom. The letters intimated as plainly that if, for any reason whatever, the Lady Rosalind did not appear at the time specified, namely at breakfast-time this morning, the jewels would positively be sold and the proceeds used to endow some philosophical society or other. You know enough of the irascible Earl to know that a threat like that would be made good. And I knew that he had never seen his kinswoman, that I might appear in her place, that I might save the diamonds to her. She is my best friend. Do you blame me?"

"But," answered Desmond, his wonder growing with her explanation, "why did not the Lady Rosalind appear herself? Why must you take her place?"

She had merely seemed nervous, agitated, anxious, before. Now, there surged up into her eyes a look of positive mortal fear. Again looking swiftly over her shoulder, her voice hardly above a whisper, she struggled to answer calmly,

"I don't know where the Lady Rosalind is! We had rooms adjoining last night. She—she is gone!"

"Gone? How? Why? Where?"

She shook her head. He saw her lips quiver.

"I am afraid," she whispered. "I heard a noise last night. I heard some one scream. It must have been Rosalind! I looked—she was gone!"

The remembrance of the piercing screams he had heard last night made even Desmond shudder.

"When was it?" he asked sharply. "At what time?"

"I heard the clock striking. It was exactly at eleven o'clock."

Eleven o'clock! He too had heard the cries of distress.

"But why," he asked suddenly, "why don't you tell the Earl?"

"Because," she moaned, "there are—— Yes the view is really wonderful from here. Isn't it a darling little river!"

Jessup had entered. Desmond felt that he must again delay the questions he wanted to ask.

"Mr. Desmond, sir," Jessup was saying smoothly, "his Lordship would like you to come to him for a few minutes in his office."

Desmond, his mind vainly trying to solve the tangle of riddles, excused himself and followed the urbane servitor who bowed the way—and who last night had sought to murder him.

CHAPTER IV

A SECRET MISSION

THE old man looked up from the litter of papers upon the flat-topped mahogany desk in front of him and nodded to Desmond.

"Take a chair, Philip," he said gravely. "Here, sit near me. I want to talk with you."

Desmond drew his chair close to the desk

Digitized by Google

and sat down, wondering what the Earl had to say to him this morning.

"I have seen little of you, Philip," the old man went on, his dark eyes peering intently over the long, white fingers, which he had placed finger-tips together. "But I take you for a real Desmond. A real Desmond may have many more bad habits than the common run of men, nay gamble and drink like the very devil, and may run into debt, and do a large part of the things he shouldn't do—but a Desmond, if he is a Desmond, is a gentleman, and he is trustworthy. That is the important thing—trustworthy. For I have a very important commission I am going to put into your hands to-day, Philip, and I could not do that did I not feel that I could trust you to the death."

Desmond inclined his head, but made no answer.

"I am getting old, and I want to wind up all of my affairs—as a gentleman and a Desmond should. I am going to make you my heir, Philip. No. Don't thank me. I've got to make somebody my heir, you know. You will have the title, and you must have the estates and the money to go with the title, in order that the title itself may not become a mere empty name.

"I have had the Lady Rosalind come here for two reasons: first, that you may come to know her. I hope that one day you may come to see that there must be a suitable Countess of Villecourt. The Lady Rosalind is in every respect the suitable Countess. You see how frank I am? Secondly, I wanted to give into the Lady Rosalind's own hands that part of the Villecourt fortune which should go to her. I mean the Villecourt diamonds. You have heard of them? Yes, they are very valuable. They are the only part of my fortune which I shall not give to you—and I suggest the way of bringing them back into the family!"

Desmond, trying to express his gratitude and not to commit himself in the matter of the Lady Rosalind, was cut short by the uplifted hand of the Earl.

"Come, come. I know what you would say. But I have not told you everything. I have said that I need the help of a trustworthy man. Let me explain in part, for I can not explain in full."

He stooped to open a lower drawer of the desk, from which he drew a small packet of papers sealed with red wax, plain and unaddressed.

Holding the packet in his long white fingers, his eyes upon Desmond's he continued slowly:

"There is a man in New York, whose name and address I am going to give you, if you will take it upon yourself to accept my commission. These papers must be in his hands just as they are here, unopened, untampered with, as soon as a steamer can take them to him. It will be a trip under sealed orders, for I can not tell you what the papers contain. He will not tell you. You will never know. But I can tell you that there is no one else in all the world than a Desmond—and you are the last Desmond!—to whom I would dare intrust them. I have two hundred pounds in Bank of England notes here in my desk. That will pay your passage, and perhaps leave you enough for a dinner in the gay American town. Having left the papers in the hands of the man to whom they are addressed, you will spend a few days in the States if you like, and then return here. Will you do this for me, Philip?"

Having been told in one breath that he was to be made the Earl's heir, and then asked for so simple a favor in the next, prompt acceptance was the only thing left for the young man.

"I am very glad that you can trust me with a matter which you say is of grave importance," he responded warmly. "I shall be eager to do as you ask."

"I thought so, I thought so." The white beard wagged approvingly. "I am anxious to have it done and over with immediately, Philip. I want you back here within the month. A steamer leaves Liverpool tomorrow afternoon. Can you take that, Philip?"

Without a second's delay, Desmond answered that he could.

"Then we shall have no delay about it. You will go to Chittendale this morning. You will take the first train from there for Liverpool." He took from another drawer a bundle of bank-notes and tossed them to Desmond. "There should be two hundred pounds there," he added. "Count them."

Desmond counted the little fortune which had been tossed into his hands.

"Yes, your Lordship," he said, "two hundred pounds. But I shall not need—"

"Tut, tut, my boy. You are a Desmond.

Digitized by Google

If you need more, a cablegram to me will bring them. And there is the packet of papers."

WITHOUT answering, Desmond put the red-sealed papers into his coat-pocket.

"The address of the man in New York?" he asked then.

"It is Edward W. Tarleton, Empire Hotel."

"Edward W. Tarleton, Empire Hotel," repeated Desmond, to fix the name and hotel in his mind.

"And," went on the old man, with quiet emphasis, "I do not think that it will be necessary for you to write that name anywhere, the address being so simple that a memorandum would be useless. And I do not think, Philip, that it is necessary for me to say more to you regarding the secrecy of the mission upon which you are going? That packet must be put into Tarleton's own hands—no one must know that you are carrying such a packet and, should it be found that you were in possession of those papers, I should expect you to stake your life in defending them. Once lost, they could never be replaced—and I should be ruined. You see how I trust you, Philip."

Desmond rose to his feet, buttoning his coat about the priceless packet.

"I shall carry the papers to their proper destination," he said with firm assurance. "And I am gladder than before, your Lordship, to know that you have chosen me to act for you. I am ready to go now."

"You will have a few preparations to make. Run up to your rooms—which, by the bye, will be waiting for you until you return from your voyage—and get what things you are going to require. Horses to take you into Chittendale will be ready in twenty minutes. Come here before you go."

Desmond bowed and left the room, running lightly up the double flight of stairs, and hastened to his rooms. Throwing into his suit-case the few articles which he deemed indispensable for the trip he was to make, he was ready in five minutes to return to the Earl. As he was locking his suitcase, he suddenly remembered the little dagger which he had taken out last night. Where was it? For a moment he could not remember what he had done with it. He had taken it with him when he had entered the secret, rock-hewn apartment. Had he left it there?

Now he remembered. He had put it upon the little table by which he had dozed during so much of the night. In the morning, when he had returned to his own bedroom, he had neglected to pick it up.

He turned toward the picture behind which was the hidden doorway. Then he paused. It might be that he was watched even now—that Jessup was spying upon him for a positive solution of the mystery of his disappearance last night. The secret room had saved his life once. Perhaps, when he returned to the castle and gave his whole mind to the clearing up of the strange events which had occurred during so few hours, perhaps the secret door might again be of use to him. He swiftly decided to leave the dagger where it was.

Eager for the beginning of his mission, which, to his young imagination, was tinged with adventure, flavored with romance, Desmond hastened back to the Earl's little office—and interrupted a conversation between the butler, Jessup, and his master. The two men broke off suddenly upon his approach. He thought that Jessup started guiltily.

"That will do, Jessup," said the old man, lifting his voice. "I understand. You may go. Well, Philip, ready so soon?"

The young fellow smiled.

"Yes, your Lordship," he laughed, "ready and, if truth be told, somewhat anxious to be upon my voyage!"

The other sighed and shook his head.

"So it goes, so it goes, when one is young! You make my own youth seem so near, Philip, my boy—and so far away! Well, sit down for five minutes, until the horses are ready. Let us smoke a cigarette together. Yes, I will take one of yours. I am out of the habit, these days."

The two men lighted their cigarettes and smoked in companionable silence for a few moments. The clatter of horses' hoofs outside upon the driveway seemed to awaken the Earl from a deep reverie.

"I suppose you'd better start, Philip," he said, getting to his feet. "I am sure you will have a successful trip. I hope it will be equally pleasant. You have all of your directions clear?"

"Yes, your Lordship. The packet is to be put into the hands of Mr. Edgar W. Tarleton, Empire Hotel."

Digitized by Google

"Exactly. Mr. Edgar W. Tarleton, Empire Hotel. Oh, something I had nearly forgotten! Did you bring with you the little dagger I wrote about?"

"I did. I haven't it with me. I left it up-stairs. It will take just a moment——"

The other laughed.

"Oh, no. It doesn't matter. When you get back will do as well. There is a story about that little bit of steel. I wonder if your father ever told you?"

"He never did. He merely told me of it during his last sickness, and asked me to keep it always."

"Well, the story can wait also until your return. The thing saved my life once, your father's life once. I have a curiosity to see it again, that is all. And now you'd better be going."

TIME and time again, Desmond had been upon the verge of speaking to his grandfather of the strange occurrences of last night—and each time he had shut his teeth down upon the declaration, scarcely knowing why. Now once more, as he was about to take his seat beside the driver, did he all but speak. A moment he hesitated—and then he was spinning away down the graveled driveway, the Earl's voice crying *bon voyage* to him.

Well, after all, the Lady Rosalind's friend, Evelyn Stanton, had a deeper interest than himself. She would speak of the disappearance of Lady Rosalind. His own affair, the coming of the Crimson Mask, the nocturnal visit of Jessup and the man who came with him—that was his own affair, and he would look into that matter personally upon his return.

Half an hour's driving along the white roadway, winding through corn-fields and meadow-lands, brought Desmond to the village of Chittendale. Here the driver left him, and he went to the inn to await the coming of the train, which was due in half an hour.

Sitting in the tap-room, paying scant attention to the goings-on about him, Desmond's mind was busy with the adventure before him. He wondered vaguely as to the contents of the packet he was to guard so carefully. He thought over the events of last night, puzzled over them frowningly, finding no explanation anywhere. What had happened to the Lady Rosalind? Why did not Evelyn immediately raise the alarm? Why did she not tell the Earl?

But, above all, the one thing to which Desmond's mind went back time and time again, was: *Who was the lady in the crimson mask?*

From these things his mind went back to the mission upon which he was now going for the Earl. The papers were to be handed to Mr. Tarleton, Edgar Tarleton. But was it *Edgar?* Surely his grandfather had said *Edward* when he had first mentioned the name!

Then, upon Desmond's return with his suitcase, ready to go, he himself had blundered into saying *Edgar*—and the Earl had said, "Yes, *Edgar* W. Tarleton!"

The train pulled into the little station, and Desmond hastened to secure his seat. The train was late and stopped but a moment and puffed out. Desmond, looking back, saw the man who had driven him into the village watching him. As the cars began to move, the man whipped up his horses and started toward the castle.

It was but a trifle of an incident in itself, but Desmond, his mind stung into something more than curiosity by the happenings of the last twenty-four hours, became suddenly suspicious.

Last night he had been in danger of being murdered by the Earl's confidential servant. He had been warned of that by a mystery-cloaked woman. He had heard a scream in the dead of night, telling him that he was not the only one in the old castle who was in danger. The Lady Rosalind had disappeared. And now, the very day after his arrival, he was being sent across the ocean!

The Earl, in sending him, had told him that the matter was as important as life and death. He had said that the papers were to be given to a man named *Edward* Tarleton—and five minutes later had said that the name was *Edgar* Tarleton! And now Desmond had been spied upon by another servant of the Earl!

With a swift determination, with no hesitation in the world, he drew the packet of papers from his pocket and with a penknife cut through the red wax which sealed them.

The packet opened across his knee. An exclamation broke from his lips as he saw what it was that had been entrusted to him to carry him out of England.

The papers were absolutely blank!

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V

NIGHT AND THE CASTLE WALL

ANGER and bewilderment struggling in his breast, Desmond decided in a flash what he was to do. The train stopped at the way-station of Miltonsmere, a dozen miles from Chittendale and a little more than half that distance from Villecourt Castle. He would get down there and make his way back to the castle, where his whole interest now centered, where there was so much for him to solve to his own satisfaction. He vowed to learn what game the Earl was playing, what had happened to the Lady Rosalind, what part in the tangle of circumstance the little silver-hilted dagger played and who the woman in the crimson mask was.

Having left his suitcase and overcoat at the inn at Miltonsmere, Desmond strode off toward the castle. It was nearing noon, and he was in no haste to come to the end of his journey.

For he had planned carefully, and everything was based upon his coming to Villecourt about dark. He felt that then he would be able to gain admission to the castle, by a rear door, perhaps, without being seen. Then he must trust his good fortune in getting up the two flights of steps without bumping into any of the servants. That done, he could be sure of remaining hidden in the secret apartments during the night.

He hoped for another meeting with the Crimson Mask, and the chance of learning something from her. If he failed in that, at least he would be on the field of action, to make use of any circumstance which might occur.

In a pleasant, shadowy grove, half a mile from the roadway, he ate a part of the lunch he had brought from Miltonsmere, stowed the rest away in his pockets for the night and, lying upon his back, smoked and idled the afternoon. With the sinking of the sun, he was again on his feet, walking on toward Villecourt, but keeping away from the road and making certain that he was not seen by any of the few passers-by who held to the road. It was sufficiently dark when he came into the castle grounds for him to essay his entrance.

For a while, all went well. He gained the orchard unseen, and paused there, sheltered by a great apple-tree. For several minutes he remained still, his eyes upon the side of the gloomy old pile toward him, watching for a sign of the Earl or of Evelyn or of Jessup. The night was still, the castle as silent as the night itself. Here and there a light shone dimly through a closed window. But never a sound came to his eager ears.

Swiftly, noiselessly, he stole from his hiding-place toward the shadow of the castle walls. Once in that shadow, he felt that he could find entrance unobserved, through some door or window left unfastened.

A breathless moment as he scurried across a faintly lit square of lawn and plunged into the sheltering band of darkness, his hand against the cold rock of the north tower. A pause while he listened for any sound that might tell of the whereabouts of any of the servants. Nothing. Once more he moved stealthily along, feeling his way, toward the rear of the old building.

Suddenly he stopped, his hand going to the gun which he had dropped into a coat-pocket. Surely that was something moving like himself—something clinging to the wall and drawing almost imperceptibly nearer to him. Crouching, quick-eyed, tense, he waited.

A hand shot out from the dark and seized his right wrist in a clutch of iron. At the same moment he felt two strong arms wind about his body. Struggling in impotent fury, he was borne to the ground by the sheer weight of two bodies, his arms pulled behind him, a strangling grip upon his throat all but choking the life out of him.

"Shall I do for him?" a sharp voice panted at his very ear.

Desmond shuddered as he saw a faint glint of light upon a steel blade, and remembered the scene in his bedroom only last night!

"No," commanded another voice—Jessup's voice. "Not now—not here. There may be other plans for him. Help me get the fool into the dungeon."

RAPIDLY, with brutal roughness, thongs were passed about his wrists and ankles, a gag was stuffed into his mouth, between jaws pried painfully apart. In another moment, Desmond was entering the castle upon the shoulders of

Digitized by Google

the two men, so helpless that he had given over struggling.

As they passed in, Jessup called sharply to a third man, the man Desmond had seen in the darkness.

"All right, Truxton," he called softly. "It's just that fool Desmond come back. Keep a look out until Matson here gets back."

Desmond heard a growling sort of voice in answer, and then the door closed behind him. Having ceased all struggles now as a mere waste of the strength which might stand him in good stead soon, he gave his whole attention to the way along which he was being taken.

First, his captors passed through a narrow hallway, then, turning a sharp corner, through a small doorway, which Jessup unlocked with one hand. Ten steps farther, in pitch-darkness now, and he was put down upon the floor.

"Make a single sound," growled Jessup, "and I'll crack you over the head. Lend a hand here, Matson."

Matson went to Jessup's aid. Desmond could hear them fumbling with a chain. A moment later and he could hear the two of them straining at some sort of a heavy, hinge-rusted, creaking trap-door. As the trap was flung back against the wall, it gave out the clank of iron.

Again commanding him to make no sound, Jessup shot nimble fingers through Desmond's pockets. Then, his feet unbound, his own revolver jammed against his ribs, Desmond obeyed the sullen order to go down the stairway, scarcely three feet wide, which twisted and writhed downward into the blackness of the castle's very foundations.

He counted thirty steps before his foot found a level floor. At the same time, his eye caught the faint glimmer of light.

He was in a great dungeon, windowless, and lighted only by one dim lantern, swung from the ceiling, which the weak rays never reached. Even the walls of the damp, loathsome place were too far away for the struggling beams to drag out from the inky blackness. Here and there, half seen, half guessed, were great stone columns reaching upward until they grew one with the obscurity above.

As Desmond's feet touched the rough rock floor, his eye caught these meager details, and to his ear came the faint jangle of chains. The two stone columns nearest him seemed to be alive. He would have sworn that he saw each one move. And then he understood. To each pillar a man was chained!

Brutal hands dragged him past the two forms he had seen and pushed him against another column. His body set the heavy chains fixed there jingling. He felt a chain being passed about his waist, felt leather bands buckled tight about his wrists and ankles, knew that he was fastened in bonds which a yoke of oxen could not have broken.

And then, worse than all, he felt Jessup's breath hot in his face.

"Anything else, Mr. Desmond, sir?" Jessup's voice was sneering. "Decided to come back, did you, sir? You won't give us the slip and go strolling in the orchard to-night, will you, sir? Nothing more, sir? Good night, sir. Come, Matson."

Desmond's teeth shut into the gag, which Jessup did not offer to remove, and the veins upon his forehead swelled in anger. He heard the two men retreat toward the stair, pass upward to the heavy iron trap-door, slap it into place and fasten it. And then about him there was nothing but vague dim forms and silence.

He tried to move and found that he could turn his head freely, but that any considerable change in the position of his body was impossible. Now he could count seven pillars of stone, as he peered about him with straining eyeballs. Soon he made out that to five of the columns men were chained. He marveled at their silence—until the truth rushed in upon him. Like him, they were gagged; like him, powerless to make any sound other than the pitiful jangling of chains which filled the damp dungeon.

WHO were they? What did these things mean? Was Jessup a madman, his insane brain clutching at the suggestion of these relics of the middle ages which he had found, and now, prompted by a demoniacal delirium, put to their old usage? But how account for his accomplices? Was it all some hideous plot against the Earl and his family? Still, there was little explanation there. For was not the Earl himself a part of the infernal cabal?

Suddenly, remembrance of the Lady Rosalind came to him. Was she, too, confined here? He peered more intently into

Digitized by Google

the gloom about him. His eyes came little by little to make out objects they had not seen before. Far away, he thought he saw the walls shutting him in, circular-wise. Straining in his chains, he could look in all directions, seeing that in all there were eleven stone pillars, and that, besides himself, seven men were prisoners here. They were all men—he was at last certain of that. All strange to him, but all men. The Lady Rosalind, if she had not met a worse fate, must be shut up in some other dungeon.

Hour after hour Desmond stood in the horrible silence. His jaws, held wide apart, ached until he fancied them splitting. The straps and chains about him cut into his flesh, until he thought that he would have cried out, had he been able to use his lips. He had at first tried to shake himself out of the chains, to burst the thongs, to work the gag out of his mouth.

But now he stood in inert hopelessness, seeing that his case would be little bettered even if his shackles were thrown off. For stone walls, stone floor, stone ceiling shut him in—and the stone was probably six feet thick.

When he had come to feel deathly sick from the weariness of his cramped position and the maddening pain of his aching jaws, Desmond heard the trap-door being lifted, and then steps coming down the stairs. Two men, Jessup and Matson, appeared bearing two baskets and wooden buckets. Matson stopped at the column nearest the door, while Jessup hurried across the dungeon to the farther side. Removing a gag from a man at each pillar, they took bread from the baskets and thrust it forward without a word, gave with it a cup of water and then went on to the next, having replaced the gag.

Meantime, not a word had been said by the men being fed. Desmond marveled at that, thinking he himself would have something to say when his turn came. Why were they so silent? He was to learn before he could more than ask himself the question.

Jessup had gone up to the second man, whom Desmond made out as a tall, muscular, young fellow. No sooner had his gag been removed than he broke out into a volley of curses.

"Shut up!" Jessup called sharply. "Not a word, or——"

"You coward," bellowed the man, struggling in his chains. "I'll say all I please. You don't dare——"

Jessup had wheeled upon him at the first word. There was a flash from Jessup's hand, a report that reverberated with a thousand echoes in the stone-walled dungeon, a shriek, and Desmond saw the tall, muscular form stiffen in its chains, and suddenly grow limp.

Jessup, the gun still smoking in his hand, laughed shortly.

"That'll teach you something, —— you!" he snarled. "And no more trouble feeding you!"

In turn, the other six men were fed and watered like so much cattle. Then Jessup came to Desmond, still shuddering in his chains.

"Here," he growled, putting down his bucket and basket, "here's your dinner. And you're not to do any talking while you eat it."

THE gag was jerked roughly out of his mouth. He shut his jaws, hoping to find relief from the pain that was shooting through them—and only found a new pain, like a knife-cut. He pushed the bread away, but drank thirstily of the water.

"Not hungry, eh?" muttered Jessup. "Well, you will be by the next time."

Putting the gag back into place, he joined Matson at the stairs and was gone.

Again the hours dragged on miserably. There, a few feet before him, a horrible suggestion as to his own fate, a dead man hung in his chains. The oil lantern sputtered and went out, the darkness being now so black that Desmond could not see his own shoulder. His whole body ached. Needle-like pains shot through him. His temples throbbed until he thought he would go mad with the riot in his brain. Horrible fancies came to him, leaping like demons out of the hellish blackness about him. Now and then a rattling chain startled him so that his own chains were set clanking.

Hour after hour, and no ray of light, no ray of hope. He moved in his chains, dozed once, awaking in the sweat of a nightmare, shivering from cold and weakness. Again he must have dozed. He would have cried out, had not the gag in his

Digitized by Google

mouth shut off his utterance. A hand had been laid upon his shoulder!

"Be still!"

It was the merest whisper. He awaited, tense and expectant. Was it Jessup returned? How could he have come so softly? Or was it——

Quick hands were about his face, removing the gag. Swift hands passed to the chain about his waist, loosened it and removed the straps from his arms and legs.

He was free!

"Come!" said the same whisper. "Follow me. No noise!"

Unhesitating, he followed the guiding hand which led him through the darkness. He was at last conscious of a draft of air. He thought that he had passed through some sort of passageway. He was positive that he had heard behind him a grating sort of sound, as of a door upon rusty hinges.

For fifty paces he followed—and he knew that the dungeon was not fifty paces in diameter! Then he was certain that a door had opened and that they had passed through it, and that it had closed behind them.

A sudden flood of light blinded him. His hand flew to his eyes. Peering beneath his fingers, he saw standing at his side the lady in the crimson mask.

CHAPTER VI

THE VILLECOURT DIAMONDS

SO, FOR the second time in the twenty-four hours, she had saved his life!

As his eyes grew accustomed to the light into which he had stepped, Desmond stepped forward, a question upon his lips, a determination in his heart to know now who this woman was who came and went like a spirit, seeming to pass through the walls of the castle.

She lifted her hand, as her eye caught the look upon his face, and her fingers were laid across her lips. Afraid that she was going to disappear again as she had last night, he opened his lips to speak. But, shaking her head, her fingers still upon her lips, she signed him to follow her in silence, and passed from the small, candle-lighted room, down a hallway.

The passageway was so narrow that he was positive that it must be hollowed out in the thick walls of the castle. Presently, at a sharp turning, the masked woman took up a candle which had been left burning there, and went swiftly down a second passageway, which branched off to the right. Then came darkness, save for the candle's beams, and a flight of stairs, cut in the rock and so narrow that Desmond's elbows rubbed each wall. This flight ended, there came another similar to the first.

Then the masked figure paused a moment for Desmond to come up. As he reached her side, she swung open a door, and he followed her into a little room, which, among these rough stone walls, surprised him.

It was a perfect bower of a place, the fitting boudoir of a pretty woman. The walls were hung with tapestry, evidently ancient, but well-preserved. There was an exquisite little mahogany dressing-table, also ancient, but in perfect condition. There were two chairs, a table covered with books, a wide, richly covered couch and, upon the floor, a thick, dark red carpet into which his feet sank deeply.

Strangest of all, it seemed to him, there was a window with the stars peeping in! What kind of secret room was this, he asked himself, that had a window which might be seen a mile away! But he saw that, while the stars shone in, no other eyes than theirs might look in here. For the outside walls of the castle formed a sort of courtyard here, and no window had ever been pierced in the wall opposite. Even the courtyard below was denied all view of this window, by a ledge which ran below it.

Closing the door behind her, placing the candle beside two others burning upon the table, the figure in the mask sank into one of the chairs, while Desmond was waved to another.

"What can I say to thank you?" he began swiftly. "Last night and to-night again——"

"There is small time, small need for thanks," she interrupted.

It was the first time he had heard her speak out, above a whisper. He had felt instinctively from the first, when she had seemed a picture coming to life and stepping from its frame, that she must be young—and very pretty. Now he knew that she was young. Her voice, sweet, musical,

Digitized by Google

refined, told him that. The white rounded chin, the gleaming forehead above the mask, the escaping soft brown tresses under the feathered page's hat, hinted that she was what he had thought her in appearance.

THERE was a note in her low-toned voice which, for the moment, made him forget many of his surmises about her and the enigmas which were puzzling him. She was weary, tired out, anxious. That her voice told him, too.

"There is much to be done before morning," she went on, her voice appealing to him strongly. "Much for me to explain to you, much for you to do."

"Then first of all," he cried impetuously, "tell me who you are!"

She shook her head. He thought that she was smiling.

"That is not important," she answered him lightly. "Are there not other things you should know first?"

"No!" he maintained stoutly. "That first and above all! Will you tell me—now?"

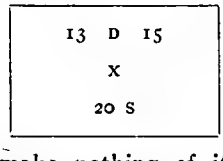
"That may come later. Now, I have other things, more important things, to tell you. Here, look at this."

Somewhere from the fold of her loose blouse she had drawn a dagger and held it out to him. He recognized it as the one he himself had brought at the Earl's bidding.

"It is mine!" he said, taking it into his own hands. "I have looked at the thing often enough. What is the importance of the thing? Did the Earl want to see it merely for the sentimental reason which he gave me? Because it had saved his life and my father's life?"

"A very pretty explanation. Only—all a lie! No, there is a more important reason than that. Notice the marks stamped into the hilt."

He did so. He had done so before. There was little enough explanation there. The letters and figures, which had been stamped into the silver hilt, evidently some mark of the maker, were meaningless enough.



"I can make nothing of it," he said, looking up at her.

"Nor could any one, even though he knew it to be some sort of a very simple cipher. Did you know that the Earl, when he wrote to you to come to Villecourt, wrote at the same time to the Lady Rosalind?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that he asked her to bring with her another heirloom? An old bracelet of her mother's?"

"No. You mean——"

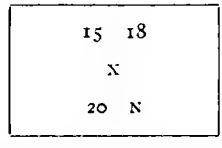
"Look for yourself."

She removed from her wrist a plain gold band, which had been hidden by the lace of her sleeve.

"The Lady Rosalind's bracelet?" he asked quickly. "How came it into your hands? Where is the Lady Rosalind?"

"I have told you there is no time for questions! How came the dagger into my possession? Look at the inscription upon the inner side of the bracelet."

He did so. Still there was little meaning.



"Nor can I make anything of this," he muttered.

"You would in a moment, if you knew the traditions about Villecourt Castle, which you could not know. Traditions which for nearly two hundred years have been known only to the Villecourt women! And still they say that a woman can not keep a secret!"

Was she then a Villecourt? How did she know these things? He was about to ask her, when she went on, swiftly:

"I MUST explain rapidly. There is so little time, so much to be done! Place together the first line of the inscription upon the dagger and the first line of the inscription in the bracelet. Then you have, 13 D 15 15 18. A few minutes puzzling over that would tell you that, changing the fifteenth letter of the alphabet for the number fifteen, the eighteenth letter for the number eighteen, you would have the word 'DOOR.' And if you knew, as the Villecourt women did, that the door of this hidden room in which we now are had been called for three

Digitized by Google

hundred—years the 'Thirteenth Door,' you would understand!"

"That is why the Earl wanted the two articles," he cried, a bit of her excitement creeping into his own voice. "But the other letters and figures?"

"I do not know," she answered, shaking her head. "That is, I have not proved what I am sure of. You are going to help me. It is going to be very simple, now that dagger and bracelet have at last come together. Throw this rug aside."

He did so, with quick, eager hands. At the exact center of the floor, cut into the solid rock, was a cross, a mark exactly like the "X" on both bracelet and dagger.

"Something is hidden here?" he asked breathlessly.

Again she shook her head.

"I do not think so. But there is something *near* the cross which is the key to its hiding-place. What, in a case like this, should you expect to find the 'N' and the 'S' stand for?"

It came upon him in a flash.

"North and south!"

"Almost too absurdly simple, isn't it? And the '20 N' and the '20 S'?"

"Twenty feet, north and south! No—the room is too small. Twenty inches?"

"Or twenty times the length of the dagger!"

From the table-drawer she took a small pocket-compass. Placing it exactly upon the "X," she waited for the needle to come to rest. When it had done so, Desmond did not wait to be told to lay off, in opposite directions, north and south, twenty dagger-lengths. At each spot so ascertained, he made a pencil-mark.

"And now what?" he asked, getting up from the floor.

Across the room from him, standing near the mark he had first made, she smiled at him. He knew she was smiling, and he hated the mask which kept him from knowing with his eyes that she was fascinating to look upon.

"Won't you take off that mask?" he implored.

"And now," she said in a businesslike tone, "now we are going to see if I have guessed right. Put your heel upon the mark you have made and press gently. I'll do the same here. I have tried it alone, pressing at one point and then at the other—and nothing happened. I think both must be pressed at the same time. Now. Ready?"

"Ready."

Together they brought their heels down firmly upon the pencil-marks. Together they stood, scarcely breathing, waiting for something, they hardly knew what, to happen. Then they looked from one to the other—and saw nothing happen.

"Maybe I didn't mark the spots exactly right," he hazarded.

"But you did. I measured and made marks—you can see them if you look closely—just where you did."

"Then we have read the cipher incorrectly?"

"I am afraid so."

She turned and walked to the table. Desmond saw her stop suddenly, heard a little cry of delighted excitement.

"What is it?" he asked, coming quickly to her side.

She pointed to the floor at her feet. There, a slab of stone had sunk several inches and then slid into a hollow hewn into the stone at its side, leaving a square, box-like hole, about a foot square and nearly a foot deep. Gazing into the opening, his eyes were dazzled with the flash of color, the white, sparkling, living light that shone forth.

With a gasp of astonishment he dropped to his knees and thrust his hand into the opening. A cry broke from his own lips then.

The hollow before him was little less than half filled with diamonds!

CHAPTER VII

THE PRISONER

"THE Villecourt diamonds!" cried Desmond.

"Yes," she answered calmly, "the Villecourt diamonds, Mr. Desmond. There is not less than a hundred thousand pounds of English money represented in that little pool of light. And we have found them!"

For a moment he stood looking into the heart of that glittering, flashing, many-hued mass of sparkling jewels. Their combined effulgence, the lure of the living fire in their clear depths, held him fascinated. breathless. Then, slowly, another call urging him, another fascination upon him, he

Digitized by Google

turned toward the girl, drawn by the witchery of her dainty self.

"Now," he said quietly, "you will tell me the things I want to know?"

"Yes, some of them. We must hurry, though. There is still so much to be done! Where shall I begin?"

"At the beginning. Will you tell me—who you are?"

"Is there nothing more important?"

He could feel, rather than see, that she was smiling at him. He could see the rounded whiteness of her throat, the tantalizing curl of a stray wisp of hair, the merry sparkle of her eyes through the mask.

"Nothing!" he answered positively.

"Why?"

"Why? Because," he answered fervently, "because you have twice saved my life. Because I am going to like you very much, when I know you. Because I have my share of curiosity, and you appeal to every grain of it in my make-up. Are those reasons enough?"

"Quite! But in spite of your reasons, I think that the mere matter of my identity can wait. Sit down, and I shall tell you of the other things. To begin with, as I have already hinted, the secret apartments of this old castle have been known by the women of the Villecourts for three hundred years—and, during that time, there has never been a son or a husband or a lover who has ever dreamed of their existence. Mother told daughter, and when the daughter had grown to be a mother in her turn, she told her daughter and none other. So the secret has never gone to the men of the race.

"Before the death of your grandmother, the late Countess, the old lady concealed the Villecourt diamonds here, and had the inscriptions made upon the bracelet and the dagger, vowing that unless the two trinkets came once more together in—in the marriage of the last of the Desmonds, namely yourself, with the last woman to whom the knowledge of the secret apartments passes, namely the Lady Rosalind—that, unless that happened, the Villecourt diamonds would never again blaze upon the throat and arms of a woman."

"But they are found," he interrupted, "and such a marriage is the last thing in the world to be expected—now."

"Then you are not interested in the Lady Rosalind?"

"Not in the least," he answered promptly, his eyes trying to search out the beauty he knew must lurk behind the band of scarlet silk, his voice quietly emphatic.

She laughed softly.

"If the Lady Rosalind should hear of such ungallantry? Perhaps she may, from me! But to go on with the story. The present Earl evidently knew that the diamonds had been hidden, not stolen, as rumor has had it, and that the story of their hiding-place was in some way inscribed upon the dagger and the bracelet. Therefore his first letter."

"But the disappearance of the Lady Rosalind? The endeavor to impersonate her? The attempt to send me out of England? To murder me! What place have these things, what explanation——"

The booming of the castle clock interrupted him. The woman in the crimson mask lifted her hand for silence, while she counted the strokes.

"Ten!" she cried, springing to her feet. "It is time. Come! You will see for yourself now—and you will understand!"

He paused, thinking of the diamonds. Was she going to leave them there?

Where they had been a moment before was now the rough stone floor, with no sign of an opening. The rock had swung silently back into place.

"They are safe here," she said swiftly, interpreting his look. "Come, we must hurry."

STOPPING for no explanation, she led the way back, down the two flights of stairs. He wondered vaguely what the next episode was to be in this tangle of rapid events, thought for a moment that she was surely going back to the dungeon from which he had so lately escaped, and shuddered at the memory of it. Flitting like a white shadow before him, she turned suddenly into a hallway he had not seen, a hall so narrow that he could hardly squeeze his shoulders through it as he followed her. The roof was low. He stooped and moved cautiously. The walls were damp, slime-covered and evil-smelling. The darkness was opaque, impenetrable. Even the ghostly outline of her figure was lost now, swallowed up in the blackness. He paused a brief moment, thinking that he had lost her.

The faint sound of her light footfalls,

Digitized by Google

the brushing of her garments along the wall ahead of him, reassured him. Again he moved on, scarce breathing, wide-eyed, trying to catch a glint of light somewhere, straining his ears for the sound of her walking. The damp, close air grew unutterably foul. His senses told him that he was a thousand feet underground. He felt as though he were smothering, as though he had been cast alive into a deep, narrow grave. But ahead of him he could make out, now and again, the faint rustle, the hardly audible sound of her hurrying feet, and he followed where she led, grim, silent, cautious.

Groping his way forward, guiding himself with a hand upon the damp wall, he wondered where she was taking him, how far he must go in the black, tortuous bowels of the castle.

Then he felt her hand flutter out and touch his arm, heard her low breathing.

"Look," she whispered.

There in the wall were two pin-points of light, pricking the darkness, through two such funnel-shaped holes as had given him, last night, a view of his own bed-chamber. He obeyed her in silence, putting his eye to one of the perforations, conscious of the warm contact of her lithe body as she stood at his side, tiptoeing to look through the other.

Desmond had sought for explanation, and now he only found more matter to perplex him. He was looking into a dungeon-like chamber, small, low-ceilinged, its bleak walls hung in dreary festoons of dust-covered spider-webs. There was a rough wooden table, with a candle sputtering feebly upon it, its rays sickly yellow, as though the air were not pure enough to do more than supply the little oxygen required for combustion.

At the table sat a man, his head bowed wearily upon his two clasped hands. Desmond could not make out the shadowed features.

Across the narrow cell was a heavy iron door. Even as Desmond's eyes found it out, the door, creaking harshly upon its long disused hinges, was slowly opening, and another man was coming in. The man at the table lifted his head so that the struggling light from the guttering candle threw his face into relief.

Desmond all but cried out aloud with the shock of sudden surprise.

"It is the Earl!" he whispered harshly.

"Look!" she commanded him eagerly. "Look at the other man."

The other man had entered and closed the door behind him. He stood within the circle of light cast by the candle. And then Desmond's amazement amounted to stupefaction. He could not believe that he saw what he saw. For just as clearly as he could make out the Earl of Villecourt sitting at the table, so clearly could he see the Earl of Villecourt standing across the room.

"There are two!" he muttered confusedly. "Two Earls!"

"Be still," she whispered, her hand tightening upon his arm. "Watch—and listen!"

THE man who had entered spoke shortly, and Desmond, hearing the voice, knew that this was the "Earl" to whom he had been presented that morning, the "Earl" who had sent him upon an errand which might have taken him to America.

"Have you made up your mind, your Lordship?"

The voice was low and quiet enough, but, for all that, cold, stern, threatening.

The man at the table answered as quietly, his own voice deeper, equally stern.

"I made up my mind yesterday. I have had plenty of time to change it. I am not going to change it for a scoundrelly cheap play-actor."

The "play-actor" raised his hand to his head with a quick gesture, sweeping off the white hair and beard and mustaches, showing a hard, overnicely chiseled face of a young man.

Desmond, still amazed, began to understand.

"I am not so sure of that," snarled the younger man, an ugly scowl deepening the lines between his shrewd eyes. "Before you decide, let me tell you what I have done already. I have the dagger that Desmond, your grandson, brought, and I have sent him on a fool's errand to America. I have the Lady Rosalind's bracelet. And in fifteen minutes I can put my hands on the Villecourt diamonds! A cool hundred thousand pounds, your lordship!"

The old man stirred uneasily. Desmond could see the nervous working of his long, white fingers as they drew little, broken

Digitized by Google

lines with the burnt match upon the table.

At last, clearing his throat, with an evident effort to command his voice, the Earl spoke, with calm, steady clearness.

"You lie. If you could find the diamonds, you would take them and go. You can not find them."

"Come," cried the other, his rage flaring up in his eyes, his hand striking the table heavily. "Don't be a fool. I tell you I can have them in fifteen minutes—in five. You know that I do not want them when I can get money instead, because of the trouble, the risk, in the disposing of them. Write me your check for fifty thousand pounds and keep them. I will call off my men as soon as the check is cashed, and you can go. Man, don't you see that I have gone too far to go back now? Will you give me that check? What do you say?"

"What do I say?"

The Earl's brows were gathered blackly, his fingers now as steady as his voice.

"Falkner, I say that I know as well as you do that you have failed to find the diamonds—that you will never get them into your unscrupulous claws—that you are too much the coward, deep down in your heart, to dare harm me—and that, even if you were not, I'd die here rather than barter with your sort. And, since the air is foul enough without your presence—would you mind leaving me?"

A moment Falkner stood poised, rigid, threatening, his eyes glowing coals of malevolent light. Then he strode swiftly, silently, to the door.

"I'll go fast enough, —— you!" he cried, his tones swept by the storm of his wrath into discordant, vibrant harshness. "And you—do you know what will happen to you? Make friends with the spiders—save your candle to eat! Suck the moisture off the walls! Go mad—and die! When they find you here—you'll not be a pleasant sight to look upon."

The door clanked behind him, there came the sound of rusty bolts grating in iron grooves, the sound of footsteps growing rapidly fainter.

The Earl's head dropped on his chest. The candle-flame danced grotesquely, fantastically, mockingly.

Desmond swung to the masked figure at his side.

"It is unthinkable, unbelievable!" he cried excitedly. "We must help him!"

His hand struck the solid rock of the intervening wall and he groaned.

"We must get to him—but how?"

"Help me—here," she answered swiftly.

He put out his hand and found hers. Following the pull of her tightened fingers, he moved with her three or four paces along the wall. For a moment, she loosened her hold, and he could hear her searching for something, her hands pressed against the rock. Then came a sharp little cry from her, and again his hand sought hers.

There was a rough knob of stone protruding into the passageway. His fingers struck it and came in contact with a smooth surface.

There was a heavy iron staple imbedded in the hardened cement.

"Pull," she urged him feverishly. "I am not strong enough. We must get the Earl out and take him up-stairs to the 'Thirteenth Room.' Hurry!"

THE staple was large enough to allow Desmond to slip three fingers through it. He braced himself and threw his strength into a mighty effort, tugging with a haste almost frantic, his mind filled with a dread that Falkner might return before he could come to the Earl's aid.

Oh, if the staple were but a mere trifle larger! If he could but get a firm grip with both hands!

Again and again he jerked, his labors growing vicious with his anxiety, his breath coming brokenly, his muscless straining under the stress he put upon them. The staple remained as solid, as firm, as still, as though driven into the heart of the rock of Gibraltar.

He paused a moment, resting, gathering his strength for a supreme effort. Then, seeing that nothing was to be gained by jerking, he bent all of his force to a gradual, steady effort.

His left hand clasped the wrist of his right. The muscles of his arms swelled and bunched, the iron cut into his fingers, great beads of sweat stood out upon his forehead and ran down his face. His arms, his back, ached with the strain. He felt as though the blood pounding in his temples would burst out. He grew dizzy, as the exertion began to tell upon every cord and sinew in his body.

Digitized by Google

"I—I can't do it," he panted. "It doesn't budge."

"We must do it!" she cried impetuously. "It is the only way. Now—once more—and I will help you."

He stripped off his belt and ran it double through the staple, getting a hold with each hand. Her own fingers slipped through the staple itself, and she braced her lithe body to help him.

"Ready?" she asked. "Now!"

Again his muscles corded and knotted, again he put every ounce of strength and weight into the effort, feeling, as he strained, that her warm body was pressed close to his, as tense as his own, her arms quivering against his. There was a moment when their combined wills and forces acted together, in perfect unison—yet it seemed that they could achieve nothing but another failure. On the heels of that moment came another, made audible with the grating of rock against rock, when they fell back together, panting, exhausted, but with a heavy door open before them, the light streaming upon them from the dungeon.

Desmond sprang through the narrow doorway, forgetful for the moment of the woman whom he left standing in the passage, remembering only the old man bent wearily over his table.

The Earl had started up and was looking up into Desmond's face, a frown drawing together his heavy brows.

"Come," whispered Desmond eagerly, his hand upon the Earl's arm, his eyes going fearfully to the door where Falkner had passed out. "They may be back any minute. Hurry."

The Earl jerked his arm away from Desmond's clutching fingers, his eyes blazing angrily.

"What do you want?" he demanded. "What trap are you leading me into now? Is this some more of the play-actor's work?"

"No," snapped Desmond—then paused suddenly, listening.

From a distance, somewhere beyond the barred iron door, came the faint sound of footsteps, ever drawing nearer, growing louder, hurrying.

"Don't you hear?" he called half angrily. "They are coming back, now! Hurry, man, or I can't do anything for you! For God's sake, hurry!"

Irresolute, drawn this way and that by contending doubts, hearing the footsteps, one after the other, growing in distinctness, his eyes unwavering upon Desmond's, as though to see what lurked deep down in his soul, the Earl paused for a moment.

"Who are you?"

"I am Philip Desmond. Your grandson. Now, man, hurry!"

Still the old man stood, doubting, frowning into Desmond's eyes. Slowly his face cleared, his brows relaxed. He put out his hand.

"Then, Philip Desmond," he said, with a great sigh, "I think you have come just in time to get your granddad out of a bad mess. Go ahead. I'm with you."

Desmond could hear the rattling of the bolts of the rusty iron door. A sudden gust of wind from the passage from which he had just entered whipped the dying candle into a last spurt of flame and plunged the room into darkness. Seizing the Earl's hand in his own, he turned and ran across the room, and the two men, stumbling forward, shot into the black passageway.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPELL OF THE UNKNOWN

THERE followed a breathless moment of blind groping, as Desmond struggled with the heavy iron staple, hurling himself against the block of stone which made the door, the fear still upon him that, before he could close the exit, Falkner, and perhaps some of his hirelings, might be upon them.

But the thing which in the first place had defied his frantic efforts so long, so obstinately, surrendered to his will and strength with less resistance the second time.

He heard a faint click, and knew that two feet of solid stone intervened between him and all pursuit.

Desmond stood peering deeply into the heart of the darkness, which shut in blackly about them, straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of moving white, but no sight, no sound told him of the presence of the woman who had twice saved his life, and who had now been the means of freeing the Earl.

For a moment, he hesitated, uncertain, then, remembering her latest command, he

Digitized by Google

put out his hand until it rested upon his grandfather's shoulder.

"Give me your hand," he whispered tensely. "No use trying to see anything—just follow."

Swiftly he retraced his way along the narrow passage, turning shortly into the wider hallway, which led straight to the stairway. Still no glint of light, but not even his sense of direction, so sadly confused by these twistings in this Cimmerian underground, was necessary to guide him.

The walls were close together upon either hand. He had but to follow them, his fingers trailing upon their uneven surface, and move steadily forward.

He could hear, at his side, the Earl's heavy breathing, his irregularly falling footsteps, as he stumbled blindly on. No other sound. The Earl, no matter what was his curiosity, was as silent, unquestioning as Desmond himself.

He was grateful for the landing at the head of the first flight, doubly grateful for the second stairway, against which his foot struck, causing him to stumble forward. A sigh of satisfied relief broke from him as, upon the second landing, a pale gleam of light shot across the hallway. The door of the little boudoir was open, a candle still burning merrily upon the table.

Now he would again see the masked woman in whom, after all, his chief interest centered. He stepped aside for the Earl to enter and followed expectantly.

The room was empty.

"Philip," said the Earl, when they faced each other across the table, speaking for the first time since he had been almost flung out of the dungeon-cell into the darkness of the stifling passage, "what do you know of all this? What are we to do now?"

Desmond shook his head dubiously.

"I know little enough," he replied briefly. "I have no idea what to do. If she were only here——"

"She? Who?"

Again Desmond shook his head.

"I don't know. The woman who made it possible for me to come to you."

"Old Martha, the housekeeper?"

"God knows—I don't!" cried Desmond. "No, it can't be—she isn't old——"

He broke off suddenly, swinging toward the open door, listening. Out in the hallway was a sudden noise as of haste, the clattering of heavy shoes upon the stone floor, a sharp curse in a rasping voice, the deep muttering of men's voices. Even as he whirled, his hand going swiftly to the revolver in his pocket, the doorway filled with indistinct, jostling forms. Half a dozen men flung themselves into the room.

A GLANCE served to show him that they were gaunt and terrible-looking, their eyes staring, their hands clenched, their faces death-pale. With one accord, their wild eyes went from Desmond and the Earl back into the dark behind them. The man a pace in the lead, a great, brawny colossus of a fellow, was shaking from head to foot, his teeth chattering, as he broke into a sudden, vehement cry:

"The woman in the crimson mask!"

"Andrew!" called the Earl harshly, "what do you mean? George, Dick, Barton—are you a part of this —— conspiracy?"

The six men huddled about their master, for all the world like frightened children.

"Your Lordship," chattered Andrew fearfully, his eyes still terror-stricken, fixed upon the door and the inky gloom beyond, "it ain't that. You know it ain't that! We been shut up in the big dungeon. They—they said as you was dead!"

"You ain't dead—thank God you ain't dead!" moaned George, shaking his head from side to side, his eyes with Andrew's, upon the darkness outside.

"They done for poor Jimmy," groaned another, almost inaudibly.

"What do you mean?" cried the Earl again.

"Jimmy, old Jimmy Welsh—they done for him. The fellow as calls himself Jessup, he shot poor Jimmy dead!"

"Are you men!" stormed the Earl, sudden anger flaring up into his stern eyes. "Are you afraid? Shame upon you for Englishmen, standing here whimpering because you are afraid of a few men."

"It ain't that," muttered Andrew hastily, "we ain't afraid of no men but——look!"

He shrank back, cowering behind his master.

There in the doorway, framed in the black rectangle, the candle-light full upon her, stood the form of a maiden masquerading as a page, slippers, trunks and full blouse of pure white, a jaunty cap with a

Digitized by Google

rakish feather, also pure white, set upon her clustering curls, her face covered by a strip of crimson silk.

For a moment she stood motionless. Even the Earl shrank back, his face suddenly drawn and ghastly white, the hand which he flung out trembling pitifully.

"The Crimson Mask!" he gasped.

She came slowly into the room. Every man, save Desmond and the Earl, moved back, step by step, as she advanced. The Earl, ashamed to show the fear which was upon him, struggling for control of himself, commanded his dry throat and said, hardly above a husky whisper,

"What are you? Who are you?"

FOR answer she swept the mask from her face, and Desmond marveled at the loveliness which the piece of crimson silk had hidden—an oval face of transcendent beauty, a chin firm but delicately carved, a mouth redly perfect, deep gray eyes with a soft light burning in them.

He had in some intangible way sensed from the first that she must be beautiful. But he had never dreamed that any woman could be so lovely.

"I have the honor, your Lordship," she was saying softly, dropping him a little courtesy, "to be your kinswoman, Rosalind!"

"The Lady Rosalind!" exclaimed Desmond. "But I thought——"

"That the tall dark girl was the Lady Rosalind? She will explain that to you when you care to ask her. She has been locked up in her room, while Falkner's man, Jessup, has been trying to wring from her the secret of the bracelet. A word," she went on hurriedly, "will tell you all I know of her. Your letter, your lordship, came to me in London, and was read by my maid, Florence Davies. She had heard somewhere that you intended giving me the Villecourt diamonds. No," with a quick smile, "I am not hinting! She knew that you had never seen me. A good girl in most things, poor Florence is half mad over jewelry. The sudden temptation was too strong for her. She very cleverly forged a letter from you saying that you were making an unexpected trip to France and that I need not come until you had returned. I suspected her from the first, and allowed her to believe that I should not come. The next day she asked to be allowed to visit a friend in Wales. I let her go, and then I came on here, to slip unobserved into the castle and to come to these rooms, which I was sure no one else knew of."

"Thank God that you came!" The Earl came forward, taking her two hands into his. "My Lady Rosalind, you are a brave woman. I am proud of my kinswoman."

He bowed over her hands, which he lifted to his lips, with rusty, old-school gallantry.

Then, turning from her, his face again hard, relentless, his mouth set and stern, he faced the men who had fallen back at her approach.

"My men, this little girl has done much. She will show us the way out of here—and we must do the rest."

They came forward willingly enough, hardy, fearless men, now that the dread of the supernatural was shaken from them.

"Yes, your Lordship," answered Andrew, a bit of color creeping back into his haggard face.

They followed the Lady Rosalind in a silent procession through the hallway, through the secret door opening into Desmond's room of last night. There they stopped for a brief consultation.

"There's guns and pistols in the little storeroom, your Lordship," whispered Andrew. "If George 'll go with me, we can slip down the back stair and bring 'em up here."

"We'll all go," interrupted the Earl. "My Lady Rosalind, perhaps you would be safer here."

"I'd rather go with you," she answered simply, and Desmond fell back a pace, to be at her side.

Swiftly, but with cautious silence, they moved along the hallway to the rear stairway. Here the Earl paused for a moment, holding up his hand for silence, listening. Somewhere in one of the great rooms below, there was a hurrying back and forth, and the sharp voices of two men, their tones guarded but reaching the floor above in a confused murmur.

"Hurry," commanded Villecourt. "they have begun to fear the tables are turning. They will be trying to get clear of the castle. No noise—but hurry."

They ran down the stairs, dashed together across the hallway and, following

Digitized by Google

Andrew's lead, shot into a little room opposite the foot of the stairway. George, dragging a rifle from its place upon the wall, dropped it to the floor, the clatter of its fall rattling and echoing through the silent castle.

A moment of breathless silence, while they all strained their ears to catch a sound telling of alarm, of flight, below.

Again came the sound of sharp, angry voices, raised in nervous agitation, the sound of running feet, the slamming of doors.

Desmond was running side by side with Andrew, each gripping a gun, the others rushing along behind them, all attempt at silence discarded. The corridors echoed to their passing feet, the last flight of stairs grumbled under their eager rush. Below them came the crashing of glass, more banging of doors, quick cries of alarm.

"Never mind the rest of them," called the Earl loudly. "Get Falkner and Jessup!"

Even as he spoke, Jessup's voice rang out shrilly from the front rooms of the castle.

"Falkner," he was calling wildly. "This way, man!"

Desmond and Andrew together struck the wide doors of the drawing-room, to find them locked.

"Batter them down!" commanded the Earl. "Quick."

A half-dozen gun-butts struck the oak panels. The door shivered and flew back. Across the room, close together, a revolver in the hand of each, stood Falkner and Jessup.

"Throw down your guns!" commanded Desmond briefly. "Quick!"

The doorway was crowded with men, their lean gun-barrels trained unwaveringly upon the two crouching figures. Desmond's words rang clear, ominous. The threat of the gun-barrels was coldly merciless.

With one accord, Falkner and Jessup dropped their revolvers and lifted their hands high above their heads.

At their master's command, four of Villecourt's men laid rough hands upon them, threw them to the floor and tied their hands behind them.

"My Lady Rosalind," continued the Earl, his harsh voice dropping into a softer key, "will you show Dick and Oliver where the woman, your maid, is confined? Let them bring her here."

THE Lady Rosalind, wide-eyed with horror, her hands pressed to her breast, turned silently to leave the room followed by Dick and Oliver.

When she had gone, the Earl spoke to Andrew, his eyes never going to the two helpless forms lying at his feet.

"Go!" snapped Villecourt sternly. "Do as I say. Be quick. You other men take these two wretches down to the big dungeon. Keep them there until I come."

Andrew, his face showing his perplexity, sped away upon his errand. Jessup and Falkner, the one still doggedly silent, the other still cursing bitterly and struggling at the hands laid upon him, were borne away before Andrew's steps had died away in the wide corridor.

Desmond turned questioning eyes upon his grandfather. But no single word did the old man say, as he paced restlessly up and down, waiting for the return of the Lady Rosalind, his great brows drawn fiercely, his eyes relentless.

A woman's voice, trembling with hysterical, agonized fear, told of the coming of the woman who had been tempted by the flash of diamonds to betray her mistress and to enter the castle as an impostor. Half fainting with weakness and terror, her face blotched with weeping, her whole body shaking like a leaf in the wind, she staggered brokenly into the room, her captors close behind her. The Lady Rosalind, no emotion but a deep pity finding place upon her face, walked wearily beside her. The woman fell upon her knees before the Earl, her hands uplifted, her voice breaking from her lips in sobs which shook her from head to foot.

"Your Lordship," she pleaded, her eyes going to his face and falling before his accusing glance, "have mercy on me, your Lordship. I—I am a very wretched woman."

He eyed her sternly for a moment. When he spoke, his voice was still hard, but softer than it had been before.

"You are a very bad woman, Florence Davies," he said quietly. "But it is not the Villecourt way to make war on women. You have done no harm, save to yourself. Since it is late, you may sleep here tonight—if you can sleep! At dawn, you must be gone. That is, if the Lady Rosalind, your mistress——"

"Let her go," whispered the Lady Rosalind.

Digitized by Google

The woman looked up swiftly, a sudden gleam in her wet eyes.

"Oh, your Lordship," she murmured. "I can not thank——"

"I want no thanks," he interrupted shortly. "I have other things to attend to. Go!"

With never a glance behind her, her head bowed, her hands clenched at her sides, Florence Davies went slowly from the room.

"Where is the other—her companion?" asked the Earl, his eyes coming back to the men about him.

"She has gone, I think, sir," explained Oliver. "At the first noise—when the others——"

"Let her go. You men stay here with the Lady Rosalind. Philip, come with me. You will excuse us, my Lady Rosalind?"

She bowed at his unforgetful courtesy. Desmond followed the Earl, in silence, wondering.

CHAPTER IX

THE DUEL IN THE DARKNESS

FROM the main floor of the castle, a few steep stone steps brought them to the big dungeon and the pale yellow light of a candle. About the door the Earl's servants were grouped. The cold body of Jimmy Welsh, his face ghastly and stamped with the seal of death, lay in the half-shadow upon the floor. The men moved restlessly as Desmond and the Earl came to them.

"They are inside?" demanded Villecourt, his eyes held steadily away from the inert thing at his feet.

"Yes, your Lordship."

"Untie them."

As the men stepped forward to obey his bidding, Andrew came hurrying down the steps and to Villecourt's side. With a mere glance at his old servant, the Earl stepped into the dungeon, Desmond still with him.

The faint light of the sputtering candle died before it reached the sides of the dungeon. Here and there, a stone pillar, hung with rusty chains, lost itself in the gloom above. Falkner and Jessup, the ropes torn from them, moved their arms back and forth to get the blood running again.

As the Earl stepped through the doorway, they drew even closer together, their eyes upon his every movement. Even Jessup had stopped cursing, and watched, doggedly silent.

"All of you go outside," continued the Earl quietly. "Stand by the door. You stay here, Philip."

The men withdrew obediently, half closing the door behind them. Upon the faces of the two men watching him, in spite of their attempt at a certain jaunty indifference, was a dawning fear.

"I have little to say to you." His voice was the voice of a judge, expressionless, cold, steady. "You, Falkner, are a distant relative of mine. I have no wish to have any Desmond blood dragged into court to dishonor a long line of clean-lived men. You, Jessup, are a murderer. I should kill the two of you—but unfortunately, I can not bring myself even to crushing the life out of such vermin. You are going to be given a little chance for your lives—and, by Heaven, the chance is small enough!"

He paused again. Their haggard eyes never left his face as he went on.

"I think that you know that I am a man of my word. I am going to make you a promise, and I swear upon my honor as an English gentleman to keep it. Andrew, come here."

Andrew entered swiftly.

"You have them?"

For answer, Andrew put out his hand, holding two long-bladed, cruel-looking daggers.

"You may go, Andrew. Falkner, Jessup, I am going to leave you two men here, alone, all night. I shall take the candle with me. I swear, upon my honor as a Desmond that, if you are both alive in the morning, I shall spare no expense in sending you both to the gallows. If one of you is alive, the other dead by morning, I pledge you my word that the man who lives shall go free."

"God!" shrieked Jessup, wildly.

"Silence," cried Villecourt sternly. "Save your breath. Philip, take the candle."

Gray fear had stolen over the two drawn faces. Their eyes turned from the Earl and sought each other, each trying to read what lurked in the breast of the other, suddenly transformed by a few words into merciless enemies.

Digitized by Google

Gradually, they drew apart, their quick, animal-like glances shooting from the knives glinting in the Earl's hands to each other's snarling faces. Desmond saw them moisten their dry lips.

The Earl's hand shot out, the blade in his grip pointing to a far pillar, indistinct in the gloom.

"Stand here, Falkner," he commanded crisply. "You Jessup, stand yonder."

Slowly halting, their feet dragging like dead weights, the two men moved to the positions the Earl indicated.

"Philip, go to the door."

Desmond drew back several paces, until he felt the heavy door with the hand he flung out behind him. He went suddenly cold at heart as he saw the two furrowed faces, the gleaming, bared teeth, the staring eyes of the two men left in the dungeon.

"Philip!"

The old man's voice rang clear, cutting through the unnatural stillness. "Put out the light!"

Even as he spoke, the Earl tossed the two daggers from him, and stepped to Philip's side. The light flared up and went out. Before the pitch blackness shut down, Desmond saw both Falkner and Jessup leap forward, saw their fingers clutching at the knives at their feet. As the door clanked behind him, and he heard a sharp, snarling cry from the dungeon, he grew suddenly sick with dizziness.

TO THE silence, the darkness, was unbearable. He lighted the candle, the match in his finger shaking so that he had trouble touching it to the wick. In the flare of light, the circle of faces about him was ghastly white. The men were breathing heavily, huddled close together. The Earl was standing at his side, erect, relentless, his face inscrutable. The sputtering of the candle was uncommonly loud.

From the floor above came the voices of the men talking, faint, indistinct, unreal. He fancied he could hear the Lady Rosalind's voice. At his feet the face of the dead man seemed to grin a mirthless, inhuman grin, as the light flickered over it. A rat ran noisily across the floor in a dark corner.

The men shivered and drew closer together. No faintest sound came from the dungeon.

The stillness was a tangible thing, ominous, uncanny, threatening. It seemed to exude from the foul blackness about them. He bent his head, listening, trying with straining ears to catch some faint sound, to make out the noise of stealthy footsteps, the quiet breathing of the two men shut up together with death and terror.

His fancies were stung into keen sensitiveness. He could see the two men in there, could see them standing stone-still, listening, each trying to locate, in the rayless gloom, the presence of the other.

He could see their faces, terrible with the fear upon them, jerking quickly, now here, now there; could see the tense, uplifted hands, the eyes bulging into the black emptiness. They would hardly dare breathe. They would whirl suddenly to defend their backs. They would circle and creep stealthily, only to stop with wildly beating hearts to listen—listen.

And sooner or later they would meet. There would be a swift slashing, a madness of blind groping, a hell of century-long agony.

Still was there silence, heavy, hushed, foreboding. No faintest sound. Even the voices above had grown still. Only the sputtering of the candle, the quiet grinning face of the dead man.

Crashing into the silence, the more startling because it had been expected so long, a shriek, long-drawn and frightful, went sobbing away through the empty passageway.

The Earl had his watch in his hand. The minutes dragged by, the ticking of the watch now adding its voice to the candles. Ten minutes—fifteen—and no other sound from the dungeon.

Villecourt flung open the door and called. No sound but his own echoing tones came to answer him. The candle held aloft, he and Desmond entered together, the other men huddling about the doorway.

There, in the center of the floor, a great cut deep in his throat, lay Falkner, his outflung hand clasping his knife. Ten paces away lay Jessup.

Desmond held the candle close to Jessup's white face. He was dead, from fear.

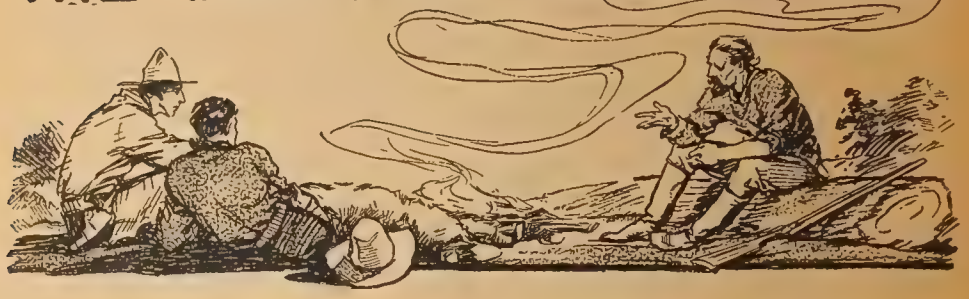
"God has taken him," said the Earl sternly. "Philip, return to the Lady Rosalind. She is alone. Leave me here."

And Desmond, stumbling out of the dungeon, thanked God for the rush of fresh air—and the sweet presence of his kinswoman, the Crimson Mask!

Digitized by Google

THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers



THOUGH told as fiction, "Butting In on Mexico" is so evidently based on a real experience that comment to that effect is unnecessary. Mr. Mullins in a letter to me explained in what non-essentials his tale varied from the real truth, but as several prominent Mexicans on both sides of the line were involved, I won't go beyond saying that the author left Dartmouth, after the football season, "to see the world a little," "mucked" a while in the Crown Reserve mine at Cobalt and then headed for the Mexican border and real trouble.

"Later on I got across all right and was through three days and nights of fighting—until the white flag ran up on the shot-riddled *cartel* of Juarez."

JACKSON GREGORY, author of "The Crimson Mask," hails from the Pacific Coast and was a member of the "Earthquake Class" of the University of California. Afterward reporter, press agent for theater, teacher, principal and, in his own words—

Left California in the Fall of 1909. Capital consisted of two dollars and a half when arrived in Reno, Nevada. Played roulette successfully at the Palace Gambling Hall, and got to Wells, Nevada, in the heart of the cattle country. Punched cows for the K. C., U. 7, and other outfits. Got on to New York by slow stages and all kinds of work, largely reporting. Worked slinging sacks and bossing "Hunks" and "Wops" in the Federal Sugar Refinery, Yonkers.

Did the Adirondacks on foot with fellow newspaperman now on the desk of the *Evening Telegram*. Hit Montreal with twenty cents between us. Worked on the Montreal *Witness*. Back to New York free-lancing. To Cuba via freight steamer, Capt. Morton. Steerage to Tampa, covering the races at the West Tampa Jockey Club for the *Times*. Westward via freight-cars, across the South and to California.

Several months ago Mr. Gregory stopped in to see me at the office on a free-lancing trip around the world, with his wife. He had a special eye on the South Seas with a view to future stories.

QUITE a while ago, in speaking of the difficulty in not slipping up now and then in a field that covers so many of the world's far corners and remote places as does ADVENTURE'S, I cited the case of our article "The Storming of Dargai" and promised to give the Camp-Fire a few of the letters that came in to us—to show how hard we get caught up when we do go wrong.

In this case we had made a straight-from-the-shoulder mistake on the date of that battle. The author was an English Army officer and an eye-witness, so we didn't check up the date. But we didn't allow for errors in copying. Other points were questioned by our readers, especially the tune played by Piper Findlater—"The Cock of the North" our article had said. On this last we seem to have been correct, but notice how even those with familiar knowledge of a big event may differ among themselves on some points.

I have no books of reference here, but I am quite sure that Dargai was fought in 1897 or '98. . . . With the Christmas number of *Harper's Round Table*, 1898, of which I was then editor, we published two colored supplements from paintings by F. C Yohn, one representing the greatest recent naval engagement, the other the greatest recent military achievement.

When your writer tells how Color-Sergeant Mackie (a non-commissioned officer) slapped the Colonel on the back, I think he describes something that could not possibly take place in the British Army or any other army. . . . If I remember correctly there were *two* pipers, Findlater and an-

Digitized by Google

other, who piped the men to the heights. Also, I think, there was another regiment in the action, although the Gordons did the great work, the spectacular charge. Very sincerely yours,

ALBERT LEE.

I'd like to hear from some of our army members, particularly the British army, on what Mr. Lee has said about slapping the Colonel on the back. And, of course, from any one else with an authoritative word on any of the Dargai incidents.

San Diego, Cal.

. . . The Battle of Dargai was fought in 1897. I was a kid at school at the time and remember reading the papers, as we knew lots of the officers. Findlater, the piper who received the V. C., did not play the "Cock of the North" but the "Haughs of Cromdale." . . .

W. TOWNEND.

Here comes one of the Gordons themselves to straighten things out about his old regiment:

St. Faustin Station, Quebec, Canada.

He has the facts O. K., but for goodness sakes put him right as to the dates, and ask about Piper Milne. Perhaps it's only a printer's error, but if I know anything about it, the storming of Dargai took place in the year of our Lord 1897.

Very sincerely yours,

ALEX. FENTON, Late of the 4th "Gordons."

And here is a line from a second letter from Mr. Fenton, in response to one from me:

It was certainly the "Cock of the North" that Piper Findlater played at Dargai, but, after he fell, Piper Milne, a boy from my home town in Aberdeenshire, took up the tune and scaled the hills with the rest of his comrades.

Very sincerely yours,

ALEX. FENTON.

London, England.

Your Dargai writer may have forgotten a thing or two in the passage of years; but he was O. K. in regard to the "Cock of the North"—the tune played by Piper Findlater. What put up my back in the yarn was the idea it conveyed—the popular one duly fostered at the time—that there was nothing done at Dargai save by the Gordons. The fellows who were on the spot know very well that the Gurkhas (First and Second) and the Dorsets as well as the Derbyshires were carrying the heavy end of the log for a long time before the Gordons came along, and had taken a lot of the ginger out of the Afridis. They had been well chopped up too, and made no fuss about it.

The spectacular episode of Findlater was picked up by the newspaper correspondent Blank Blank—one of the best, but known throughout India's coral strands as "Truthful Blank," which the same was meant sarcastic. Findlater got pipped through the ankles and sat down. The wind in the bag of his bagpipes kept on leaking. The other piper (Milne) kept on skirling. Nobody knew what tune the leak played; but ——, with the unerring instinct of a true journalist, gave it the proper name, and Findlater became immortal.

The Dorsets and the Derbyshires with the First and Second Gurkhas had been getting decimated all day. Then the general sent in the Gordons and the Third Sikhs—splendid soldiers all—under cover of a sharp artillery fire. They rushed the heights splendidly; but the Afridis declared that, if they had not used all their powder on the fellows who fought off their own bat and without any protecting artillery, they would have held the heights for a week. The First and Second Gurkhas lost 2 officers and 15 men killed, 3 officers and 47 men wounded. The Gordons lost 1 officer and 2 men killed, and 6 officers and 35 men wounded. It was collar work all round.

SOME days later I stood by with a Captain Doctor and some other Johnnies when a lot of these good fighters straggled into Swai Kot Camp at the head of the Gandao Pass. I had been out all night with the column that fished them out of the Bagh River. Every man, bar one, looked like a tramp that had been half-drowned, then dried in an ash-barrel. The exception was a little subaltern of the Gordons. God knows how he did it, but that Johnnie had nipped a clean and dry pair of his uniform (red tartan) socks and had a clean kilt and a saucy sporran—hanged if I don't think he had on spats. Anyhow, there he was, like a new toy out of a bandbox, hiking along in the middle of that unholy rabble as if the whole —— outfit belonged to him. I never saw him again.

I'm not strong on Pushto, but according to my lights the reiterated cry "Din! Din!" really means something like "Holy War!" and is analogous to some such cry as "England St. George!" "Faith and Freedom!" or "Hell and Blazes!"—according to the temperament of the warrior. *Din*, doubtless, means "faith." It also means "Day," and about three dozen and a half other things. But "Din! Din!" is a battle-cry, or the cry of a Ghagi who starts slaying Kaffirs or Giaours for the glory of God and the improvement of his own harem in paradise. Your proper Takka, however, would as soon think of howling "Din! Din!" in a pious way as I would of howling "Cockles alive—oh!" He doesn't care a whoop in —— for his chances of paradise. He is a heathen heart and soul, whose only real prayer in life is spoken when a male child is born to him. Then he knocks a hole in the side of his house—such a hole as a careful thug would pick in the mud of it—and passes the kiddy in and out of it three times, praying like old Harry all the time "Be a thief! Be a thief! Oh, be a thief!"

It's a great country.

Very truly yours,

E. A. MORPHY.

P. S.—Reading through the foregoing and reflecting on the same, I remember that there were comparatively few Takkas on the Dargai side. The men on the ridge were, if I recall the facts correctly, Orakzias. These brave tribesmen are probably pious followers of the Prophet and only thieve incidentally—not exclusively—for a livelihood.

E. A. M.

Digitized by Google

San Francisco, Cal.

It was in 1897, not 1907. I know the Gordon Highlanders. I met them in South Africa. I think I told you I had been soldiering there. What fixes the date so firmly in my mind is that when I was trying to ride a mule at Graspan in order to get up to the front—remounts were darned short—the Gordons came hurtling back from Magersfontein on the Modder, where they had been shot like sheep in the barbed-wire entanglements of the Boers. "Bullets?" said one. "Mon, Dargai was a fool to it!" That was in December, 1899, and the Gordons had only then come from India and the scene of their glorious charge. Here's another incident that might interest you. I asked a piper at the camp-fire to play us "The Cock o' the North." "Nay, mon," he answered, "Ah will no' pipe 'Cock o' the North' sine Jock Findlater deesgraced the Gor-r-r-r-dons!" Findlater, I might mention, went home to England, was awarded the Victoria Cross, and appeared on the vaudeville stage. His offense was that he traded on his heroism. Yours very truly,

L. WARBURTON.

AND, to close with, here is a word from a letter that came to us from the town of Winnifred, Alberta, Canada, about this same article on the storming of Dargai:

If the author ever comes this way, I will take pleasure in presenting him to some of the old soldiers who can give him other exciting stories, and to one who was with the soldiers at Dargai; he cried when he read it.

YOU already know that Frederick Arthur Dominy, whose "Yaller Hedges, College Man" is in this issue, grew up among the life-savers of Long Island and has for years been an officer in the Service. Here is a scrap from one of his letters:

Some of the surfmen, at least, read my stories. I had one the other day ask me when another yarn would appear in ADVENTURE. He said that a fellow member of his crew had recognized in one of them some incidents connected with his first month in the Service and was wondering if I had written anything more along the same lines. It was strange that that particular man should have run across the story, for I did have him in mind when I wrote it and, unconsciously, made him into the principal character.

I SEE a way in which I think the "Camp-Fire" can make itself more valuable to its readers. At some time in our lives most of us have lost track of one or more comrades. We'd like to locate them again, but there is no way—no address, no clue. The big world has swallowed them up.

ADVENTURE reaches hundreds of thousands of readers. Probably more than any other magazine in the world it is read by the rolling stones—those who move from place to place. It is the clearing-house for the great freemasonry of wanderers on land and sea. It also goes into the homes and reaches those of fixed abode. The "Camp-Fire" has become what it was intended to become—a place to which all of us turn with something of personal interest and where we expect to find news of real people. What better medium could there be for picking up the trail of lost comrades?

Indeed, it has already served that purpose, and still oftener have I forwarded letters to some man whose name had been seen in the magazine by a friend who had lost track of him. Why not start a little "post-office," a little "Department of Lost Trails," as a regular feature of the "Camp-Fire"?

WE HAVEN'T much space to spare for it, but it wouldn't need much. John X. Smith hasn't heard of Henry Z. Jones for ten years. Under a brief heading explaining the department, will appear, with similar notices:

"Henry Z. Jones, write John X. Smith, 225 Elm St., Tucson, Ariz."

If John X. Smith doesn't want to publish his address, he can be addressed care of this office. If some brief phrase is needed to identify Smith in Jones's mind—such as "John X. Smith, who was in Lima, Peru, in 1897," it could be added. Letters of inquirers will not be published, except when of general interest and with the writer's consent. Each inquiry must definitely state whether or not we are free to publish. We reserve the right to discontinue a notice at any time and to use our discretion in any matters pertaining to the department.

Send in your inquiries as soon as you please. I have some I want to make myself. And remember always that every magazine is made up some little while before it appears on the stands. For example, I am writing this in January and you won't see it till March 3. The March number is already closed. So don't be surprised when your notice doesn't appear in the next issue after your letter.

THERE will never be more than one "Huckleberry Finn," but Raymond S. Spears, in the course of his many wanderings by lake and river, has made the very intimate acquaintance of the great

Digitized by Google

Mississippi and the extremely interesting and amusing people that float upon its broad bosom or get into mischief along its edges. And he gives us the results in "Down the Old Mississipp'."

Mr. Spears's tale is of three tenderfeet from Utica, N. Y., who start down the Old Mississip' in a motor-boat, become the habitual and perpetual goats of the whole river-population, blunder into many ridiculous predicaments and keep us grinning happily from start to finish.

No, this isn't another "Huckleberry Finn," but it's close enough to it to be chock-full of genuine humor and human nature and to give a wonderful picture of actual life on the Father of Waters.

Incidentally, Mr. Spears' water trip this last Summer was a lone skirting in a skiff off the north shore of Lake Superior. Those that know tell me that this little exploration could not have been child's play, as that north shore-line is a rough customer for small boats.

AT LAST month's Camp-Fire I told you of the very successful organization of the Adventurers' Club of New York. The other day I received a bunch of newspaper clippings and a long letter from Captain W. Robert Foran telling of the equally successful organization of the Adventurers' Club of Chicago. Among other things, he writes that "the Chicago *Record-Herald* News Service supplied long stories to no less than eighteen big city papers throughout the country, and they want more on the subject." Many of you, therefore, will have read of the new Chicago Club long before you read this.

Most of you, too, are familiar with the names of at least some of the twenty charter members who form the nucleus of a club that already gives promise of growing to a size limited only by the desires of the members themselves: Baron Guido von Horvath, world traveler, late captain in Hungarian army; Frank R. E. Woodward, late war correspondent, soldier of French African army; Dwight L. Loughborough, soldier, Philippines, traveler, war correspondent; Clement Yore, writer, late of Royal Northwest Mounted Police; H. Bedford-Jones, writer, traveler; Medill McCormick, world traveler (owner Chicago *Tribune*); Phil Sawyer, soldier, artist; Jay Cairns, Harry Irving and Paul T. Gilbert, war correspondents, writers, travelers; Capt. W. Robert Foran, soldier, traveler, big-game hunter, explorer, writer, and organizer of the club; E. W. Helm, traveler, soldier, actor; Edwin J. Feldes, traveler and big-game hunter; John T. McCutcheon, cartoonist, traveler, war correspondent, big-game hunter; W. D. Boyce, traveler in South America and British East Africa, big-game hunter, newspaper publisher; John F. Bass, war correspondent (brother of Governor of New Hampshire); George Holmes Cushing, writer, traveler; Richard Henry Little, war correspondent and traveler; H. B. Smith, South American traveler; Sigmund Krausz, writer, world traveler, late officer Bulgarian army.

Among the numerous applicants for admission since the dinner are: Barrett O'Hara, (Lieutenant-Governor-elect of Illinois), late Captain in the Nicaraguan Army, and 33rd Regiment in Cuba; George Kavanaugh, war correspondent in China, Boxer rebellion and Philippine War; Paul Cowles, Superintendent of Central Division of Associated Press at Chicago, traveled extensively in Orient, rebellion in Hawaii and formation of Hawaii Republic and retirement of Queen "Lil"; Christian D. Haggerty, city editor of Associated Press in Chicago, war correspondent in Nicaragua, Boxer uprising in China, in Japan Associated Press war correspondent during Russo-Japanese War, and Associated Press correspondent with Madero during Mexican rebellion.

THE dinner was held at the Chicago Press Club, where a special room has been placed at the Club's disposal. (The Club also plans a special Summer camp.) A telegram of congratulation and welcome from the Adventurers' Club of New York was read, and the members declared themselves for as close an alliance as possible with the Adventurers' Clubs that are beginning to spring up all over the map.

One is organizing in Honolulu; the movement is started in Los Angeles and San Francisco; Philadelphia and Washington will probably be next in line. If you are an adventurer, see what you can do to add your home town or district to the growing list.

By the time the next "Camp-Fire" reaches you the Adventurers' Club of New York and their comrades in Chicago will have settled upon the details of organization, and the way will be made plain and open to the

Digitized by Google

admission of clubs in other places, so that as soon as possible the brotherhood can offer its members the advantages of a national or international order.

BARTON WOOD CURRIE, whose "Law of Club and Fang" appears in this issue, spent considerable time in the West, but once he was a Harvard student. He ended that epoch of his career rather adventurously, entered the New York Law School and enlisted in the Navy for the Spanish-American war instead of taking his bar examinations. He says he got a chief yeoman's uniform and as far as the foot of West Twenty-eighth Street, while his only battle was on First Avenue, where a pair of highwaymen relieved him of a beautiful piece of blue hardware and six dollars. But he has had more adventurous adventures, and these the Camp-Fire will hear later.

HERE is a man who heard of it too late to join the Algot Lange expedition to the Amazon, but who is ready and anxious for any venture that will bring excitement and have need for his trained services. "I am a physician and surgeon and, while fifty years of age, as young as I ever was. I have had two years of work in Siam, first as a medical missionary and later in charge of the local native hospital system of Bangkok." Address WILLIAM R. LEE, M.D., care the Camp-Fire, ADVENTURE.

DON'T you think it would be a good plan to start a regular department in the "Camp-Fire" to serve as a clearing-house and a sort of friendly and fee-less employment-agency for real adventurers? There are so many like Dr. Lee who inquire for a path leading to excitement, and as many others like Algot Lange, R. S. Button and "Amazon Charlie" who have a particular venture in mind and are looking for good men to go along with them. As it is, I can only reply personally to the best of my ability, and then perhaps, when space permits, publish such letters and forward replies to the inquirers.

Wouldn't it be quicker and more to the point if we had a regular corner in every issue for men or adventures? Replies could be sent direct or forwarded through this office.

Naturally neither I nor the magazine could be in any way responsible nor vouch for any letter or writer thereof beyond the fact that we had received it and published it in good faith. We couldn't offer to report on men all over the world whom we had never seen or heard of.

And naturally we would reserve the privilege of not publishing any letter or part of a letter that seemed unwise or unsafe or seemed to us outside the province of the department. But none of this would diminish the real value of such a clearing-house. The man seeking actual adventure would find here the names of men who could put him in touch with it; those seeking comrades could find here the names of men looking for excitement. Having accomplished that, the department would be no longer needed and every man could investigate and decide for himself.

What do you think about it?

AND here's another idea on which I'd like opinions from the other members of the Camp-Fire. Along with the department suggested above, why wouldn't it be a good idea to run each month a little article of maybe only a few paragraphs, written by some one with first-hand knowledge, on some one field of present-day adventure?

For example: pearling in the South Seas; service in the United States Army or Navy; whaling; exploring expeditions in Africa, Borneo, South America, etc.; searching for lost treasure or lost mines; the French Foreign Legion (don't do it!); the armies and navies of other nations; revolutions and wars here and there; orchid-hunting, etc. Take, for instance, the British Army, briefly explaining such points as: how, when and where to enlist; under what conditions are Americans and Canadians eligible; length of service; physical and other requirements; can you buy your discharge; what regiments promise best chance of foreign lands or active service; how change from one regiment to another; pay; treatment; food; chances of promotion; differences between the regular and the Indian army; what medals and honors open to rank and file; pensions, etc., etc.

If well done, it would make rather interesting and educative reading, wouldn't it, even for those of us who don't intend to enter a given field of adventure? To those who do, it would be invaluable, by point-

Digitized by Google

ing and clearing the way, by advice that saves needless mistakes or trouble, or perhaps by preventing one of us from making an experiment he would later find exceedingly distasteful or worse.

How about it?

AS TO the scout, Jack Spencer, in "The Devil"—a real man, though not his real name. This from the author:

You are, of course, at liberty to relate what I have told you of him. I would not, however, mention his name for the reason that I make him do so many things which —— himself would not have done. And he never was a beacher. Some of his friends might take exception to the mention of his name in connection with my tales.

But when you do mention him, you may add, if you choose, that a braver man, a truer friend, a more honorable man, a bigger-hearted man than he never lived. Go with a fellow to the edge of the earth, far away from the haunts of men, and be up against it for something to eat and water to drink, if you would know the caliber of a man. And God knows that scout was a man! He wore number eleven shoes, and his heart was bigger than both his feet together.

Here is part of the author's first letter about this man whom he so justly admires—a personal letter to me, by the way, from which I had considerable difficulty in persuading Mr. Loughborough to allow me to quote. In the end he sacrificed his own wishes for the sake of his comrades around the Camp-Fire.

He was known to nearly every officer and to many of the enlisted men in the old —— Army Corps. I think I told you of his death. He served under General —— in campaigns against the Indians in the Southwest. The newspaper boys in the Philippines all knew him intimately. He was a close personal friend of General ——'s, and of General ——'s family.

A striking character. He knew no such word as fear. He was audacious; quick to think and quick to act. And as loyal a friend as ever a man had. There was, of course, no mystery about him. I never knew his antecedents, except that he had been a cow-puncher and an Indian scout.

And he actually pulled off that *diablo* stunt! He was lost in the swamps along the Baluag River. He saw a big house a short distance up the road. He determined to get something to eat. He did. Then he slept in the house that night, killed a couple of chickens and cooked them. The next morning he stowed his prizes in his haversack and set out again. There were several Americans with him. One of these was a close personal friend of mine—a newspaper chap.

This remarkable stunt was "pulled off" the afternoon of April 22, 1899, the day before the death of Colonel Stotsenberg. The scout was in that fight. And he was hunting Pablo Tecson, whom I have described in the story.

I knew him well, was under fire with him a number of times, and visited him a short time before he died in hospital. Literally worried himself to death because he couldn't get back "plunkin' at them goo-goos." His wound was insignificant.

The scrap which I have described between the scouts and a party of rebels is indelibly impressed on my mind. It was near Pateros, up the Pasig River from Guadaloupe and San Pedro Macati. Quite an interesting event while it lasted. But that's another story and has really nothing to do with big Jack Spencer.

IT IS some little time since we've had one of Joseph Mills Hanson's stories of the Mississippi Valley and the West in the old days. Here is what he says about the one in this issue:

"The *Sevastopol*, Cotton-Clad" is founded on General Banks' Red River campaign in 1864, though, as you will see, the Civil War furnishes only a background and not the motive of this story. During the Red River campaign several Union gunboats and transports were actually left behind as described, and had to fight their way out against desperate odds. As for the struggle between the ships of the feudists, that is imaginary so far as that campaign was concerned, though every student of the Civil War knows that just such fierce, merciless family feuds sprang up in every border State at that time and were carried through to the bitter end, which end in some cases is not even yet reached.

IT LOOKED to me like a perfectly good idea, but, to make sure, I put it up to eight or ten of the Camp-Fire who have had more than the usual amount of knocking about the world. To a man they were for it. Had often felt the need of it; wanted one for their next trek into the waste places. We consulted as to form, size, material, wording, etc., and have now, we think, worked the idea pretty well along toward the best practical form.

The best part of it is that it serves a very useful purpose for any man, whether he is going into places a white man has never seen or merely into the jungle of a great city or along the routine paths of his daily life. Adventure is always hovering invisible at our sides. It comes to all of us sooner or later, in this guise or in that, and sometimes the results are unpleasant.

This little idea we have been working on is a very simple one. But after you've turned it over in your mind a while you'll begin to realize that it has some very real advantages. It's like a gun in Texas—maybe you're not likely to need it often, but when you do, you need it most awfully —— bad.

Digitized by Google

BRIEFLY, this is it: A species of identification-card, good all over the world in case of real emergency. But your name does not appear on it anywhere. There are times when a man on entirely legitimate business may not wish his real name known. A detective, for example; a spy in war-time; a writer gathering material and not wishing to have his real name known, or even the fact that he is a writer; a secret-service or diplomatic agent; an explorer in unfriendly country; a soldier who, on account of his family, enlists under an assumed name; a sociologist preferring not to have his business known by those among whom he is studying facts and conditions; a newspaper man on certain kinds of assignments.

These cards are, of course, not for purposes of ordinary identification at banks, in business, etc. Solely for extremely serious emergencies or in case of death itself. A man run over in a city street, badly injured, wishing his friends or family notified, but preferring no newspaper publicity—or, to save his family the shock of a newspaper notice or even a message sent direct, preferring to have the news reach only some man friend who would break the news to the family gently and tactfully. A man unjustly jailed by the Russian police, with no chance to send an ordinary message. A man unconscious and near death with a dangerous tropical fever. An explorer dying in the Arctic or in a South American jungle, anxious that when his body or his whitened bones are found by some other white man his name and identity may not be a blank and that definite news of his death shall reach his next of kin. And a thousand similar emergencies. In all of them the little cards will do the work—and probably do it more simply, safely and satisfactorily than any other method.

BUT how identify without a name? Use a serial number. The durable little cards will each be printed in as many of the following languages as it will hold, say six or eight: English, French, German, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Chinese, Hebrew, Portuguese, Japanese, etc. Its brief message, in each of these languages, will be about as follows:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. Letters will be forwarded unopened by us. The names and addresses filed under each serial number will be treated as confidential. We assume no other responsibility; nothing else is needed.

Later we'll try to work out a system whereby those who wish can arrange for telegraph or cable notification by depositing with us a small sum sufficient for us to guarantee a message sent collect.

NATURALLY, in all the above we shall have to protect ourselves against anything that requires too many changes in our records or involves correspondence not within the scope of the plan, and shall reserve the right to use our own discretion wherever there seems to us to be an abuse of the purposes of the system. We don't anticipate trouble of this kind, but it's foolish to make sweeping promises in advance, and this month we are only stating the plan in the rough, so that we may have opinions from the rest of you before giving it definite shape.

It is our idea to furnish a card, free of charge and entirely as a matter of courtesy, to any reader who sends us a stamped addressed envelope and the names and addresses of self and friend for registry. Also, if possible, to provide, for adventurers into the jungle, a similar card of aluminum or other material proof against heat, water, and general wear and tear, perhaps to be worn around the neck or like a buckle on the belt. For these metal tags a charge sufficient to cover the bare cost of manufacture would be made.

Give me your ideas on the subject. If you care to send in your application now, go ahead. That will give you a serial number pretty close to No. 1. But don't be surprised or annoyed if there is delay in receiving your card. We won't start them till we've got the idea into perfect working order. Send in your stamped and self-addressed envelope, and full names and addresses of self and friend or relative to be notified. Then rest on your oars.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

Digitized by Google

Traveling Men

Here's a side-line for your spare time by which you can easily make spending money without going one inch out of your present route.

FOR years and years the news-dealers of this country have been itching for the opportunity to get their magazines direct from the big publishers. Now the time has come for them to realize their dream and we want you to help them, help us and help yourselves.

We can now supply news-dealers direct with EVERYBODY'S, ADVENTURE, THE DELINEATOR, THE DESIGNER and THE WOMAN'S MAGAZINE. We need not tell you what ready sellers these publications are. But it takes time to reach 30,000 news-dealers, so we have adopted this method of appointing Traveling Men as our special representatives for special territories.

If you will fill out the blank and mail to us, we will arrange to place you in a position to represent us in your territory. All communications absolutely confidential.

Your Name and Age

.....

Street and City

.....

State

.....

Names and Addresses of Two References

.....

.....

.....

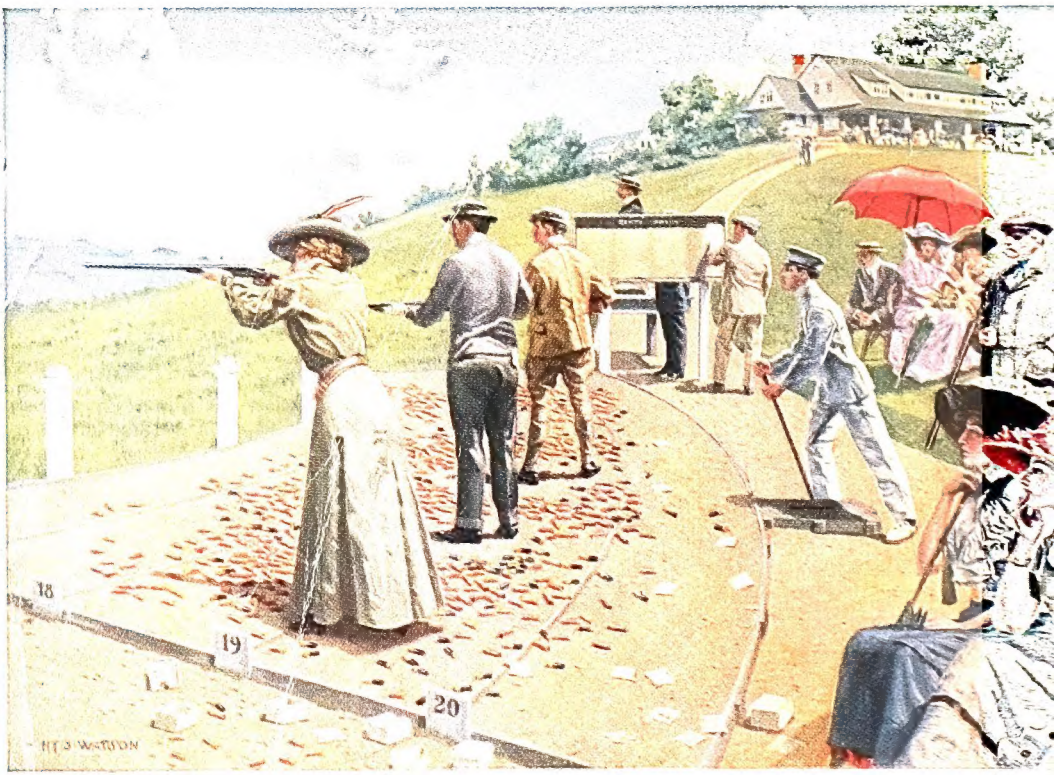
.....

Publishers News Company

Spring and Macdougal Streets

New York City

Digitized by Google



TRAPSHOOTING ADVENTURES

AT THE GUN CLUB

Plenty of "Game" and Excitement at the Traps

How many times have you read a story in which the shooting played spicuous part? Haven't you wished you could "wing the bird" or "lay the "monarch of the forest" as did the hunter in the story? The m gun club offers you the place, the time and the "bird,"—the chance to

Become a "Crack Shot"

able to shoot with unerring aim wherever the furred or feathered game comes within Trapshooting has no game laws,—every day is "open season" at the gun club. Ne there a bag limit,—birds are plenty and their flight is just as elusive as that of live The prizes offered at "big shoots" are as worthy of your markmanship as the big

Send for FREE Booklet

Full of enthusiastic descriptions and photos of actual Trapshooting. Write today for "Th Ailuring" Booklet No. 392.

DU PONT POWDER CO.

AMERICA'S PIONEER POWDER MAKERS ESTABLISHED 1802
WILMINGTON, DELAWARE

Digitized by Google